

Woman at the Well: Crossing Boundaries in a Time of War

John 4

Holy Faith, Salene

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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen

Oh my friends. We are in a time. For such a time as this, is our faith in Jesus needed.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well, interacting with Jesus is one that has continually reminded me of Christ's love. It has touched my soul for decades. In college this amazing interplay between Jesus and the woman with five husbands, who became the first in John's Gospel to wonder aloud if Jesus is the Messiah, lodged in my heart. A group of actors embodied this piece of scripture at our Sunday College night mass, and that odd presentation touched me. I remember sobbing after the reading. Somehow Jesus going out of his way to care for the woman who most excluded had a resonance for me.

Later, when I was planning my ordination to the priesthood, I eschewed the traditional readings for ordination and instead asked my bishop if we might use Jesus and the Woman at the Well instead. He raised his eyebrows and said, "Yes."

For me, at that point, a closeted lesbian in a quiet relationship with Susan Harlow, I wanted to hear that people on the margins, ones whom the world might not think are fit to lead, could in fact, be called by Christ.

Thirty years later it was this passage upon which I preached my first recorded sermon during COVID. I remember the fear and anxiety. I remember climbing into [the Cathedral pulpit] this pulpit, alone in this place [the Cathedral] except for my communications person, far away at the video controls. I remember the weight of knowing we needed to be separate, that is "to come to the well by ourselves", yet that notion of being joined by Christ and each other virtually on line. We knew we were physically separate, yet emotionally joined, offering support and reminding one another that Christ was wrapping us in his Love. [We were being held by Christ and each other. ]

So today again the Woman at the Well comes to us.

What might this tale of back-and-forth witty repartee, between an outcast Samaritan woman and Jesus a Jewish man who typically would have no contact with a woman, much less a Samaritan woman with multiple husbands have to offer to us in our fragmented, polarized world of today?

In a world where our country in partnership with Israel is bombing Iran. What in heaven's name do our scriptures, our Christian beliefs have to do with our fractured world where in the name of unspecified, future security threats, according to Reuters, 6 US Army reservists are dead, 1,230 Iranians, including 175 little girls and their teachers who were in school were blown to bits, 10 Israeli civilians dead, 77 people from Lebanon no longer breathing, 3 Kuwaitis gone from this earth, 1 person from Oman killed, 3 people dead from the United Arab Emirates, 4 people from Syria killed, 13 Iraqis buried, 1 Bahrainian dead.

Regardless of our political beliefs these facts are not in dispute. These people were alive last week and had plans for this coming week. They had everyday concerns, worries, and joys. Now. They are dead. Their families are bereft. For what reasons were these people killed? Is it good enough? Is it good enough for us to lift our heads, look ourselves in the mirror and say, “Yes,” I’m ok with my country, my tax dollars helping to cause their deaths.

I find myself feeling as if I have no say, no control, no agency regarding our country’s bombing, perhaps you share my sense of impotence?

Here is a trap I believe I and perhaps you, all of us can fall into: when we believe we are unable to alter the most pressing issues of our nation, when we believe we cannot change the big thing (I cannot stop the bombing) we can fall into the trap of believing that we can change no thing, nothing. And that is simply not true. There are many things, many perceptions, beliefs and understandings you and I can alter. Particularly our own.

Any one of us has the ability to be in relationship with people who may think differently than us, who may not in some areas align with our values. The interaction of the woman at the well with Jesus gives us a road map for, crossing borders, transcending differences and creating movements and partnerships based not on our own opinions and experiences but rather upon the never-ending love of Christ Jesus.

How does that work? If Jesus and the Samaritan woman had purely staid in their own cultural, spiritual, political lanes than they would not have had an amazing back and forth dialogue. They would not have heard and seen each other in ways that made the other come alive and enable each other to be nourished by one another.

Seeing people, using curiosity rather than judgement, listening to learn rather than to respond, learning, and changing and receiving unexpected care, is how new life, new relationships, new understanding of ourselves and one another is born.

Jesus did it. The Samaritan woman did it. I wonder if we too might risk hearing each other into new life.

What can we do? We can express our beliefs and opinions regularly, clearly, compassionately and theologically to our elected officials. My colleague the Bishop of Hawaii, Robert Fitzpatrick has written an eloquent piece applying [Augustine’s theory of Just War to our current situation](#). I invite you to study his piece. Wrestle with it, see how this administration may or may not be adhering to those time-honored Christian tenets regarding war. Our time in theological study will deepen the words we offer our elected officials and the perspectives we can share with each other.

We are not impotent. We can connect, listen, learn in our own families, neighborhoods, congregations and secular communities with the goal of being in deeper relationship with one another. Knowing that when we chance reaching out, that Christ will always be with us. That might not seem like enough, but it is what we can do. And so we must for that is the work of faithful Christians, committed to Christ Jesus.

Amen.