

May what I speak and what you hear be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

An encounter with Jesus

Today's reading **John 4:5-42** is my favorite bible story because it shows Jesus as a loving, non-judgmental, knowledgeable and kind person, talking respectfully to a woman. She was not married to the man she was living with and had been married five times. Jesus does not condemn her or tell her to change. He has a very friendly conversation, taking her seriously, having a life changing effect on her and her village.

First, some background information. Jesus and his disciples are on a journey

Judea to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria.

Geographically he did not have to: You could say Jesus took "the road less traveled". *"So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar (Sikar), near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph."*

Sychar was the site of Jacob's well where he met Sarah his wife to be. Jesus was at the well at around 12 noon. Here was Jesus and the Samaritan woman but it was no romantic encounter. It was the start of a great mission.

The animosity between Jews and Samaritans was legendary, preventing them from building the great Temple in Jerusalem and with this rejection came political hostility and opposition.

Jesus' request for some water to drink is seemingly normal but as the woman points out, it was anything but. Jesus, or any other Jewish man, was not supposed to talk to woman they did not know, let alone a Samaritan. But Jesus does not have any problems with that, there are no "prior requirements" to be fulfilled before Jesus talks and acts.

There might be a feeling from our side that we have to fulfill certain requirements before we can step before God. Possibly, rituals that have to be performed for purification, having the feeling that we have to spend hours reading the bible, meditating and praying before God will hear us.

The Samaritan woman is a good example of how we should step before God. She does not have any illusions about herself, she is not proud of her lifestyle, but she is a woman that has self-respect, she speaks freely. She even challenges Jesus, she does not take what he says at face value, she examines it and that is what we are called to do. The Samaritan woman asks Jesus a lot of questions and she listens to the answers that are very different to what she is used to hearing. That

is what we have to do we have to ask Christ and listen to the answers with an open heart.

There are more things we can learn from the Samaritan woman: Once she recognized Jesus as the Christ, she ran to tell others. It was such an amazing and remarkable experience she couldn't keep it to herself. The woman told the others what she'd seen and heard and, because of her testimony, others accepted Jesus as the Christ. But they weren't content simply to know about Jesus; they wanted to know him first-hand. They came to the well to see for themselves, and, once they had their own encounter with Jesus, it was no longer a matter of what the woman had told them.

They said, "... *we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.*"

Both things are important: It is important to hear that Jesus is the Christ. But, simply adopting the faith of another is not enough. Furthermore, the experience of knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior is not a one-time thing; it's an ongoing process, a pilgrimage of walking in his footsteps and feeling his presence along the way. This is where a Rule of Life, that we are discussing in the Lent groups now, can help us to stay on the right path.

Jesus came back to Samaria where it all started at Jacob's well. A place of both romance and hostility. His mission had to do with reconciliation. To reconcile the world to God - and that included reconciling the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritan woman points out the major religious difference between Jews and Samaritans:

John 4:20 *Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.*

Jesus replies beautifully:

John 4:23-24 ²³*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'*

And here we have "the secret of the universe!!!!": Spirit and truth. "*God is spirit*" and "*we worship in spirit*", we put these two together and get: **we worship in God**, thus **God and we are one** and that is "*the truth*".

This bunch of bones, flesh and some mushy stuff that we call the brain could not do anything by itself, it is just a bunch of cells that keep changing all the time. There is not one atom in me or you that has been there longer than seven years. Form is changing all the time, is in flow. But the indwelling Life or God is eternal and that does not mean everlasting, because that is still in time, it means outside of time. Herein we have: the Secret of the Universe, that Jesus tells this woman. We are brought to life by the Spirit of God, and we are all brought to life by the SAME spirit, we believe in one God, as we say in the creed. It is a tremendous relief when one can surrender to this perennial truth. First it is depressing because one loses one's "preciousness", the "me and MY God", but then one is liberated from all attachments and can live the life God has made us for, life in the Kingdom, life in Paradise **NOW, not bound to time**, that is the secret of the universe.

What can this beautiful story mean to us:

We have to take every word in the bible and "chew" on it and see what it means for us and in our context. The woman learned: by questioning Jesus. Just reading or listening without contemplation can lead to very wrong actions, as history has shown us. Also, as Jesus shows us, we have to learn to accept also those with opposing views, have been divorced five times, have different ethnicity, sexual preference etc. The list of discriminations is very long. We have to learn to be accepting and we have to work together to create an accepting environment around us and we achieve that as John 4:24 tells us by: ... *worship in spirit and truth*, and truth is that: God and we are one.

There is a silver lining to every cloud, even the Corona cloud. We now exchange the peace with the gesture of "Namaste." The **spiritual meaning of namaste** is: "the divine in me respectfully recognizes the divine in you." **Namaste** invokes the feeling of **spiritual** oneness of heart and mind between different people.

Whether in church, at home, on our mobile phones, on the internet – we are one today.

Amen