**Readings for March 12, 2023 – Third Sunday of Lent**

 ‘‘We have heard for ourselves’

*Our encounters with Christ can change and transform us. When we “hear for ourselves” and experience God’s love and mercy, we want to live differently, and to share the good news with others.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Lord, you come to us when we are thirsty, tired and lacking faith. You stand by the well, and call to us, you invite us to drink living water. Help us to realize it is you that we thirst for.

**Reading 1** [**EX 17:3-7**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/exodus/17%3A3)

In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses,
saying, “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst
with our children and our livestock?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people?
a little more and they will stone me!” The LORD answered Moses, “Go over there in front of the people,
along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go,
the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb.
Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink.”
This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. The place was called Massah and Meribah,
because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD in our midst or not?”

**Responsorial Psalm**[**PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9.**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/95%3A1)

R. (8)  **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him.
R.**If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.
R. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works.”
R. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

**Reading 2**[**ROM 5:1-2, 5-8**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/romans/5%3A1)

Brothers and sisters: Since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand,
and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly.
Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person,
though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.
But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

**Gospel**[**JN 4:5-42**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/john/4%3A5)

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
Jacob’s well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well.
It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”
His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him,
“How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?”
—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.— Jesus answered and said to her,
“If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him
and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him,
“Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water?
Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself
with his children and his flocks?” Jesus answered and said to her,
“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst;
the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty
or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go call your husband and come back.”
The woman answered and said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus answered her,
“You are right in saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’ For you have had five husbands,
and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman said to him,
“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;
but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand;
we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews.
But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth;
and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.
God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”
The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ;
when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one speaking with you.”

At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman,
but still no one said, “What are you looking for?” or “Why are you talking with her?”
The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people,
“Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?”
They went out of the town and came to him. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.”
But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”
So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?”
Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘In four months the harvest will be here’? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.
The reaper is already receiving payment and gathering crops for eternal life,
so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work,
and you are sharing the fruits of their work.”  Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him
because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.”
When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.
Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman,
“We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

Related Reflections

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­If someone were to ask, “What is your image of Jesus?” what would you say? When I think about that question in times of prayer, I invariably come back to this scene. I find something very attractive about a Jesus who is literally exhausted from walking and most likely ministering to the crowds. This is a Jesus who is dusty, perspiring, hungry and thirsty, maybe in need of some personal space from his disciples. This is our God! How close the Christian God is to our own very human experience!

Jesus’ hope of some personal space is shattered by the arrival of the Samaritan woman who comes all alone to draw water from the well. This is curious in itself. Any of you who have ever been to the south of Spain or Italy or North Africa in the height of summer know what it’s like to be out in the midday sun (‘the sixth hour’). …Why, then, is this Samaritan woman coming to draw water at this unlikely hour? Why is she coming to this particular well when we know from archaeology that Jacob’s well was about half a mile from the town of Sychar and there were other wells much nearer in the town itself?

Perhaps I could offer an answer. Normally the womenfolk went to the well in groups in the early morning or much later in the afternoon when it was cool – it was a time to chat and catch up on the local gossip. Was the Samaritan woman making sure that she wouldn’t be noticed if she came at high noon? Was she afraid that the other women might see her and treat her as a social outcast because she had gone through so many husbands? She must have felt isolated, lonely, ostracized.

And then, the most astonishing thing of all: Jesus, a Jewish rabbi or teacher, speaks to a Samaritan woman! Shock! Horror! Jews and Samaritans had been sworn enemies for at least four hundred years… Jesus then makes this extraordinary request of the Samaritan woman, Give me a drink. The woman is amazed not only at the request but by the very fact that Jesus spoke to her at all. It was unheard of for a rabbi to speak familiarly with a woman in the open. If a rabbi did speak to a woman in public, his reputation could be ruined and here is Jesus speaking to a woman of notorious character and begging her, “Give me a drink”.

What an attractive picture of Jesus this is – a very human picture once again. He’s parched with thirst, but perhaps more importantly Jesus has no time for racial prejudices and religious narrow-mindedness – he’s totally free of all that rubbish! He acknowledges the woman as an equal. All Jesus sees is the person in front of him, he does not prejudge or condemn her. The woman is astounded that Jesus accepts her so readily, treats her with honesty, dignity and sensitive respect.

It is precisely because Jesus treats her with such sensitivity that she can be totally honest with him – she can be truly herself without any fear of being condemned. She’s so touched by this that she abandons her water jar (a precious thing in itself at that time in Samaria!) and rushes off to share her amazement and joy with the village. She returns to the very community whom she had sought to avoid. She, a Samaritan, introduces Jesus to other pagans and they believe in him. This most unlikely woman becomes an ambassador of the Good News of Jesus Christ. She is, in fact, the first person in John’s Gospel to call Jesus ‘Lord’. When she asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, Jesus responds EGO EIMI (‘I AM’) – this is Jesus making a claim about his divinity.

What might the relevance of this story be for us today? Well, every one of us, no matter how young or old, has a voice within saying, Give me a drink – quench my thirst for acceptance, inclusion, respect, love – don’t pre-judge me on the basis of sheer externals of colour, religion, appearance.

We all wear masks to give the impression that we’re strong, self-sufficient, when we know deep down that we desperately need the acceptance and encouragement of others. The odd word of encouragement, the invitation to include someone, the seemingly insignificant signs of respect for each other can have amazing positive effects – dare I say, they can bring about daily resurrections of hope. We can help each other to encounter Jesus. So, instead of associating Lent with penance (giving up something), why not make this Lent a time of inclusion, of welcoming someone who is or has become a stranger to you?

 (Brendan Comerford, <https://www.jesuit.ie/spirituality/the-woman-at-the-well/>)

From Sister Christine Schenk – National Catholic Reporter

For me, the most compelling piece of "good news" in this passage is that the Samaritan woman's search for true worship comes to fruition in her lengthy dialogue with Jesus. In the encounter not only is she changed, but so is Jesus. Her joyful embrace of Jesus' teaching slakes his hunger to fulfill God's will "on earth as in heaven." "I have food to eat that you don't know about," says a re-energized Jesus, rejoicing that God's harvest is indeed vast (John 4:32-38).

The woman's search for true worship "in Spirit and in Truth" is at last fulfilled. Jesus recognizes that he did not sow the hunger for God that already existed within her. But he did reap what another had sown. As for the Samaritan woman, she now joins a group of sowers and reapers "gathering crops for eternal life" (John 4:36). And what about us? Where do we find true worship? Where do we gather crops for eternal life?

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**Who Was the Samaritan Woman at the Well?** Though we are not told this woman’s name, she has the longest conversation with Jesus of any character in the book of John. Yet, throughout the years she has often been maligned or misunderstood because of her sexual history. This history often colors our reading of this episode. Certainly, five marriages is a high number. But in this time period, it was not unreasonable.

Widowhood was a common experience in a culture where women were married very young. Divorce in order to gain a more socially advantageous marriage was also not uncommon, though it is unclear if the Samaritans allowed women to apply for it without a male guardian as the Romans may have. So, it seems most likely that her many marriages were not a result of her choice. Her current situation, living with a man who is not her husband, could be the result of several possible scenarios. She could be a concubine, which was a legal arrangement but with lesser status than marriage. If the two partners in the relationship were not of equal social status or wanted to avoid inheritance issues, they might choose this option. She could also be a second wife, a role which was also socially acceptable but not considered of the same status as the first wife. Perhaps most importantly, we should notice that Jesus does not condemn her status but simply acknowledges “what you have said is true” (4:18), as he continues to engage her in theological dialogue.

Jesus meets this Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well after a morning’s journey and disregards social custom by asking her for a drink. This boundary crossing between a Jew and a Samaritan sparks a conversation about their theological differences. Like all Samaritans, she traces her ancestry back to Jacob. She reveres this place but is curious about this stranger who promises something greater. She has a good grasp on her own tradition’s beliefs, so she asks, “Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well?” (4:12). And yet, she is eager for the eternal abundance Jesus promises.

Jesus promises living water that gives eternal life and invites her to bring the rest of her household—specifically, her husband—to receive the goodness he is offering. This turns the conversation to her personal history and current marital situation. She responds honestly and succinctly, “I have no husband” (4:17). And Jesus affirms that what she has said is true and indicates that he has seen and knows her more fully than she might have guessed. Without judgment, he relays the fuller story of her past, and she immediately understands that he is a prophet who knows and speaks the truth. She decides to take their theological discussion a step further and asks him about the proper place for worship, one of the major differences between Jews and Samaritans. In response, Jesus speaks of a future time when all true worshipers of God will worship not in a particular place but “in the Spirit and in truth” (4:23-24).

Jesus’s mention of the future raises her hopes for the coming Messiah. She speaks of her anticipation of the fuller understanding she will receive when the Messiah comes. In response Jesus declares, “I am he.” In a sudden turn, this woman from whom Jesus earlier asked for a drink, has now found her own thirst for theological understanding quenched. She has met the Messiah, the one she has been hoping for.

**She Is Called and We Are Called:** The Samaritan woman listens with open attentiveness to Jesus as she asks him questions about her faith and hope. The longer she talks with him, the more her understanding grows until she sees the full truth: Jesus is the Messiah. Throughout this conversation she demonstrates a posture of discipleship, learning from Jesus, and now she is called as an evangelist. She leaves her water jar behind—just as the disciples left their fishing nets—a sign of her complete embrace of this calling to follow Jesus. She returns to her town and effectively shares her own experience with Jesus, inviting the villagers to come and see if they reach the same conclusion about him.

This woman without a name is a wonderful model for all of us on our own journey of faith. Her actions invite us to stay connected to Jesus and ask questions about our faith in order to come to a fuller understanding of it. She models a way of doing this with both conviction about what she has learned in the past and also openness to discovering new things about what God is doing in the world. But she takes her new learning and is propelled into action around her calling. She reaches out to her community and invites them to join her on the journey. This is the movement of all disciples—growing in faith through relationship with Jesus and moving outward to use our gifts for the sake of the world.

By Rev. Dustyn Elizabeth Keepers - <https://www.faithward.org/the-samaritan-woman-disciple-and-evangelist/>

God is waiting to offer us a great gift this Lent: the gift of a relationship with God! But sometimes, we get caught up in our fear and our guilt and we focus on ourselves and our sin.  So we hide.  We can all think of things in our lives that we are ashamed of and we hide from others, and maybe from God’s love.

Lent isn’t really about us!  Lent gives us a chance to look really closely at our lives and think about what we might want to change in it.  How can we be better persons?  If we only focus on our own sin, it becomes about *us* and it is a self-absorbed exercise.  When we are caught up in guilt, we are looking at ourselves.  But what if we change the focus from ourselves, to God’s love?  Then, we come into the amazing awareness that even though we are sinners, we are loved incredibly by God.  That is when we become people who are drawn back to that love and to our God.

A friend told me about how her father taught her to swim when she was a little girl. She stood at the edge of the pool and her dad was in the water.  “Jump in!” he would call to her.  But she saw all of water and it was big and huge and she was afraid.  Jump in!  But she couldn’t. Then he said to her while he pointed to his own eyes, “Look at me.  Look at me. Watch my eyes.  Jump.”  And she did it.  Suddenly her focus wasn’t on the water and her fear … but on her father.

God is saying to us, “Look at me!  Don’t focus on your guilt or your fears!  Jump into my arms and let me love you!”  God is inviting us to jump into the deep water into a close and loving relationship.

*Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well.
It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”*

Jesus sits casually at the edge of the well and talks to this woman.  But Jesus speaks to her directly.  He is comfortable with her.  He is offering her new life.  A friendship with him.  He wants to offer *us* the same thing - a real relationship with him.  How does he encounter us? He sits in the same place we are.  He meets us in a place where we carry our shame and we want to hide. And he wants to love us and give us a new, deeper relationship with him.

A lot of times, we try to keep God at a distance.  I know I do.  My life goes along and my relationship with God is that I am here and he is "up there."   Life is good and I have it all under control.  I will look up at God who is very far away in heaven and say, “All is well down here, God.  I’ll let you know if I need you!”  I think I don’t need God. I have my life in control, or so I think until the next natural disaster in daily life comes along. Then I suddenly realize, "Oh!  I need God in my life.  Help me, God!"

One of the first things we can really realize is that God Is Here.  Not There. God is Here.  When I finally “get it,” that God is not in some abstract place far away but here, in my own heart, just waiting for me, then maybe I can move God out of my head and into my heart.

We can read lots of theology books, go to discussions about our faith and take scripture classes. All of those are wonderful.  But if we *only* do those things, we never move outside of our head and into our Hearts.  God invites us to sit in the quiet and feel God alive and loving us, living in our hearts.

Jesus said, “You did not choose me, I chose you.” Jesus actively wants a relationship with us and our sin, our messiness doesn’t change his desire.  In fact, the messier our lives are, the more we need his love and the more he wants to love us. He longs to be with us, to have us share our lives with him and talk to him.

*The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?”* She opened her heart to Jesus and her life is different.  She left her water jar! What had been her lifeline -- her water jar -- she forgot about it. She has a new water and a new life.  She goes to town, a town in which she had been humiliatingly rejected, and she boldly calls people together to tell them about this incredible man she has met.

She says: he told me everything I have ever done. Suddenly she is no longer burdened by her past life. Her guilt and sin are not the focus.  She has heard Jesus say, “Look at me!  Put your focus on me, not on your past life” and her life is changed!  She goes through town boldly with this news of a new life.

And what is the response? *Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.”*

Jesus shows us who we really are.  Not who we WANT to be, but who we are.  Imperfect. Crabby.  Selfish. And utterly lovable in God’s eyes. It’s not a message we can hear with our brains.  It’s one that Jesus asks us to open our hearts for.  “Look at me,” he says, “and jump into the deep water.”

- Maureen McCann Waldron (onlineministries.creighton.edu)

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Discussion Questions

Jesus knows the story of this woman he meets at the well. But he seems to want her to talk about her situation with him. Why do you think this is? How does it affect her? What does that say to us?

What do you think is attractive about the way Jesus relates with the Samaritan woman? Does anything about this scripture give you hope? In what ways?

Jesus breaks the boundaries of religion and culture. What does this say to us? How can we break the boundaries of religious and cultural biases so as to accept and learn from others who are different from us? Who are the Samaritans in our world that we may be afraid to have a conversation with?

Discuss the significance of water (the uses, benefits, dangers, characteristics, etc.). Where do we see water as a symbol in our worship and prayer? In what other places and ways do we see it mentioned in Scripture? Why is water so powerful and important in connection with God?

**Closing prayers**

Dear Jesus, with your all-encompassing heart, Oh wide and spacious love, turn me toward your unconditional acceptance. I seek to be a vessel of your great love. Let me carry your love into all parts of my life, and pour it forth willingly and generously. Amen

(Joyce Rupp)

***“Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.”***

***Also:***

Take, O take me as I am;
Summon out what I shall be;
Set Your seal upon my heart and live in me*. (John L. Bell, Ionia Community)*

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***Thoughts for the coming week:***

*Consider asking God for the grace to become living water for others.*

*You may also consider these questions:* The nameless woman at the well was called to be a disciple and evangelist. What is God whispering to you about your own calling?

Who told you about Jesus? Who in your life witnessed to you that they knew and were known by Jesus?

Do I fully believe that Jesus accepts me as I am? Am I tempted to say, “my stuff is too complicated?” Or perhaps, “God, I don’t know how to find you in this mess?”

What are my deeper hungers and thirsts which only the Lord can satisfy?

Also consider this meditation adapted from spiritual author Joyce Rupp (*Prayer Seeds,* Ave Maria Press)

**Meditation for Hope: T**ake a moment and begin by recalling the gift of hope that Jesus brought to each person who experienced his presence when he moved among them.

Imagine the Spirit of Jesus stirring up hope in your mind, no matter how you’re feeling emotionally, physically or mentally. Allow the healing hope of Jesus to enter your mind and spirit.

Allow yourself to be filled with hope.

Imagine the Spirit of Jesus stirring up newness, finding the dead places that exist within your spirit, and creating a meadow of flowers inside you (or a river of refreshing, living water).

Visualize this open space, the flower buds unfolding, filling the space of the meadow with color and fragrance.

Let hope fill your mind with sense of purpose and direction. Let hope fill your spirit with life and enthusiasm. Let hope fill your heart and draw you into renewed love.

Rest quietly in your restored hope. Let the power of Jesus the healer – Jesus, the risen love, reign in your heart.