

19 March 2017
Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Brides of Christ, the Greater Jacob”

Text: John 4:5-26 (Romans 5:1-8)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

So a Pharisee, a Samaritan woman, a blind man, and a dead man walk not into a bar, but into Jesus. That’s our focus for this Lenten season. How these four very different people encountered Jesus and how He changed their lives. And how He changes our lives in the same way.

So last week we heard the Pharisee’s story. Nicodemus. And how being a Pharisee, Nicodemus had been schooled to think in a certain way: to think of the kingdom of God in terms of himself and what he did. And then we saw how Jesus turned that thinking completely upside down, and taught him that the kingdom of God is *all grace, all gift, all Jesus*.

Today we meet the Samaritan woman. She too had been schooled to think in a certain way. But her teachers weren’t schoolmasters or rabbis, but the Jews, her fellow Samaritans, and the people she rubbed elbows with everyday. And what she had been taught to think was this: You’re trash. You’re garbage. You’re not welcome with the respectable folks.

Now, why do I say that? Well, there are three reasons, three strikes, perhaps. First, she was a Samaritan. A native, as we heard, of Sychar, Samaria. The Jews considered the Samaritans as half-breeds; Jews who long ago had intermarried with those who were not Jews, and so now unclean and unworthy. People to be avoided. A good Jew wouldn’t even enter Samaritan airspace. If he had to get from Jerusalem to Galilee, since Samaria was in the middle he would purposefully go out of his way to head east, cross the Jordan, travel north on that side of the river, and then recross the Jordan into Galilee, once he got clear of Samaria. Now, you could argue that Samaritans could just ignore that stereotype imposed upon them by the Jews, but it still makes it mark. It is still demeaning. Its hard to hear that all your life and not believe it, at least somewhat. And so easy to think that you are worth less than others simply because of who you are. *That’s strike one.*

Strike two is the fact that this woman had five husbands, and the man she now has is not her husband. We’re not told why that happened; what the history there was. Was it her fault? Did she use up and spit out husbands? Or was it the fault of the men she had

married? Had they taken advantage of her time and time again, and so now she was afraid to marry again? It really doesn't matter, does it? She was used goods. Not marriage material.

And then finally, we learn that not only were the men rejecting her, but so were the women of Sychar. For she goes out to the well about the sixth hour - or 12 Noon. That time when the sun is high in the sky and its hot out. That's not the usual time for carrying heavy loads like water. For that you go early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when it's not so hot, when the sun is just coming up or about to go down. That's when all the other women would go to draw. So that tells us something. That she wasn't welcome at those times. She had to go when no one else was there. *Strike three*. She was Samaritan trash. She was used up garbage. She was an outcast among outcasts.

You can imagine how lonely she was. And how she had been trained to think about herself. This was who she was. And there was no going back.

Do you know people like that? Perhaps have even felt that way yourself? An outcast. Not welcome. Taught to think that you're not worth anything or that you'll never amount to nuthin'?

So now you can imagine how Jesus, like with Nicodemus, turned her life and thinking completely upside-down. Because He didn't reject her. He didn't just use her or want something from her. He wanted to give to her. And give to her He did. Living water. Water of forgiveness. Water of life. Water of hope. Water that would not run out or disappoint, but would give her what no one else or no thing else could. Water that would raise her from her life of living death to a real life and love. This is what Jesus wanted for her.

This Jesus who knew who she was and didn't run away! That was the first clue something different was going on here. The second was that He obviously was a prophet. But the third was this: He claimed to be ***greater than their father Jacob, who had given them this very well*** so many years ago, ***and drank from it himself***. This place was like a shrine.

But I think you need to realize something else about Jacob - a well was where, when he first came to that place, Jacob met his wife Rachel. That story would have been well known to the Samaritans who so revered Jacob and his well . . . and . . . and now, it was like it was now happening again, only greater! For this man who claimed to be greater than Jacob, and she who was no Rachel, who was no beautiful young maiden, but had been through so much. But He's talking to her! And giving to her. And claims to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour. Her Saviour!

And from that moment on, her thinking is changed. She isn't trash, she isn't garbage, she

isn't an outcast. She isn't all that at all. Here was something none of those other six men could give her. Real love. Pure love. Life-changing love. And so excited is she that in the verses right after our reading today, she rushes back to town to tell everyone what just happened. To tell everyone about her Saviour.

That's a good story. But it doesn't end there, of course. For while we do not know anything else about this woman, we do know more about Jesus. That from that well He would eventually go to the cross. He would be thrown out onto the trash heap of Golgotha as an outcast Himself, just like her. And at the sixth hour, *the same hour* when the light of Jesus' love shown upon that woman, is when the sun *stopped* shining that day, when Jesus was crucified. And then in a little while, Jesus Himself would say: *I thirst*. It's almost like He took her place! Everything she *was* He *became*.

And that's exactly right. That's exactly what happened. And not just for her, but for you and me. **Everything we are He became**. Jesus became the sinner we are so that we become the son of God He is.

Like with this woman, Jesus knows you. He knows everything about you. He knows all your sins, even the deepest and darkest and most shameful ones. But He wants you all the same. That's why He came to earth, that why He came to the Samaritan well, and its why He comes here. For you. To give you His living water. Water of forgiveness. Water of life. Water of hope. And to lay down His life for you; to give His blood for you. Blood of forgiveness. Blood of life. Blood of hope.

But this too: **to make you His Bride**. That just as Jacob met his bride by a well, and just as Jesus wanted that Samaritan woman to be His - not physical but spiritual - bride, so too He wants you to be His bride. The blood and water that flowed from His side on the cross washing you clean and giving you drink so that you never thirst again, but have within you a faith and love that wells up to eternal life. That as His bride, the Church, all that is yours become His, and all that is His become yours. He takes all your sin, all your unrighteousness, all your punishment and condemnation, and you get all His perfection, all His righteousness, all His forgiveness and life. A great exchange, Luther would call it.

Imagine if that Samaritan woman had been there that day some time later and saw Jesus on the cross. We don't know that she was, or that she was even welcome in Jerusalem. But imagine if she looked up and saw that man who loved her like no one else ever did, the love she had been looking for and yearning for all her life, now taken away from her. It was happening again! Just like it had all those times before, only this time worse.

But then imagine the joy on the third day! When risen from the dead, Jesus can no longer die. His love never be taken away. His life and love eternal. And if all that is His is ours, then this is too - His resurrection. That what He has for us now is not just for now, but forever.

So yes, this woman learned, this man really is greater than their father Jacob. His water greater, but also His love. For while Jacob's bride Rachel was very beautiful, what did we hear from St. Paul today? That not for the beautiful and *righteous* and *good* people, but *God showed his love for us in that while we were still ugly - while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Our Jacob came to make the sinner clean. To make the ugly beautiful. To make the outcast His bride.

That was life-changing to the Samaritan woman, and it is life-changing for us. *I who speak to you am he*, he said to her. And He is still speaking to us. Those same words of forgiveness and life. I baptize you, I forgive you, I give you My Body and Blood. He comes to us here at the high noon of our sin and sinfulness, and makes us His own. That just as this woman, you too learn: you are not trash, you are not garbage - you are a child of God. Dearly loved. Forgiven. Raised.

And do you think that, then, will effect how we look at others as well? Both those the world honors and those the world would seek to throw away? Both those the world say are valuable and those the world thinks will never amount to nuthin'? Both those obviously trapped in sin and those who pretend not to be? How could it not? And we who have received such life from Jesus - His living water, His forgiveness, His love - how could we not give that now to others?

Our new and greater Jacob is here. That's what that Samaritan woman learned that day. The best news of all. That when it comes to God, it's not your beauty that makes the difference, but His love for the outcast, His forgiveness for the sinner, and His life for the dead. That *God bestows on us His grace* (LSB #824) to make us brides of Christ.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.