

**Feb. 2, 2014 - Woman at the Well**  
**John 4:1-42**

“And What’s *Your* Story?”

One of the great things about all these long stories in John’s Gospel is that they are multivalent. Which is a fancy word that pretty much means there are a lot of different ways of reading them. One way to read this story is that it’s about a woman who has to go to the well at noon when no one else is there because for reasons unexplained she is an outcast. Or maybe it’s because she has, shall we say, a checkered past. In this reading what Jesus offers her is forgiveness.

Today I want to look at a different way. What if this woman is not an outcast but a victim? And it is not forgiveness to which Jesus is calling her but life-giving faith? When she says, “I see you are a prophet,” she is therefore not changing the subject but making a confession of faith.

Why? Because Jesus sees her. Like many victims today, like the poor, the poorly paid, like the homeless who live here on this island, the woman at the well is invisible to those around her. But Jesus sees her. He sees her plight of dependence. He recognizes her, speaks with her, offers her something of incomparable worth. He sees her—she exists for him, has worth, value, significance in a way she does not for most everyone else. And so when he speaks of her past both knowingly and compassionately, she realizes she is in the presence of a prophet.

That’s why she risks the central question that has divided Samaritans and Jews for centuries: where is the proper place of worship? It’s a heartfelt question that gets to the core of what separates her from Jesus. And when Jesus surprises her with an answer that is both more hopeful and penetrating than she’d expected, she leaves her water jar behind to tell her neighbors about this man.

Remember Nicodemus, the Jewish leader who comes to Jesus by night? This woman, by contrast, is a Samaritan of no account (she is not even named) who comes at noon. because just as darkness represents disbelief in John, so also daylight signifies faith. She acts just like the disciple Andrew, who after responding to Jesus’ invitation to “come and see,” goes and tells his brother Peter they have found the Messiah (1:39-42). That’s just what this woman does. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

Reading the story this way makes her a model for all who have or who aspire to have faith. So let’s look at what she does. First of all, she’s a bit lippy, isn’t she? “You gonna give *me* water? You don’t even have a bucket!” Apparently this is OK; just check out the Psalms. Second, “She doesn’t present herself as a person with all the answers. And she doesn’t deliver some slick sales presentation. In fact, John reports her as not saying much at all. Just, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” That’s a question, not an answer. But it’s the right question.

Why do the people come to see? Because she witnesses to what *she* has seen. She tells *her* story. She doesn’t need to tell much of it, because the people she’s talking to know most of it already

and can see that something is different, something has changed.

So if she's a model for us, how do we do what she does? Simple. We tell *our* story. We tell how *we* have changed. Here's the sermon challenge this week: Write down your story. Even if you have no intention of *ever* telling any of it to *anyone*, still you should write it down. I think you will find it a faith building exercise.

Here are some questions to help each of us do just that: 1. Is there a B.C. in your time line? Is there a time in your life when a relationship with God through Jesus was just not on your radar screen? If so, how has having an active faith life affected your view of yourself, the world, your relationships, your feelings, attitudes, and actions? What's the contrast in your timeline between B.C. and A.D.?

Probably for most of us there isn't much of a B.C. So here's the second question: how has your relationship with God shaped your life, changed you over time? As you have matured in the faith, how has your relationship with God helped you deal with what life throws at you? Has it helped you deal with fears and insecurities? With relationships? With forgiveness of yourself and others?

One more thing: what practices have helped build your relationship with God over time? Worship, prayer, remembrance, Scripture, conversation, acts of giving, acts of mercy, faithful stewardship?

That's *your* personal life story. That's *your* personal faith story. That's *your* "Come and see." You'll get these questions in an email. I suspect we may not be ready for this but if any of you want to share your story with others, send them to me, and I'll spread them around with no names attached.

Confession time: I have never done this. But I'm going to. I expect it to be a faith-growing experience. And I hope it will be for you, too. Give it a shot.