

A conversation with Jesus – by Douglas Tennant

This message is based upon, for the most part, the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near Sychar. The story is taken from the version of the bible called the Message and is found below. It is best read silently by yourself and then aloud with at least one other person to permit a discussion to be had.

John 4:1-42 The Message (MSG)

The Woman at the Well

4¹⁻³ Jesus realized that the Pharisees were keeping count of the baptisms that he and John performed (although his disciples, not Jesus, did the actual baptizing). They had posted the score that Jesus was ahead, turning him and John into rivals in the eyes of the people. So Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee.

4-6 To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

7-8 A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

9 The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking *me* for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

11-12 The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

13-14 Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

¹⁵ The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

¹⁶ He said, “Go call your husband and then come back.”

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ “I have no husband,” she said.

“That’s nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough.”

¹⁹⁻²⁰ “Oh, so you’re a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

²¹⁻²³ “Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God’s way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

²³⁻²⁴ “It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

²⁵ The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”

²⁶ “I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn’t believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

²⁸⁻³⁰ The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?” And they went out to see for themselves.

It's Harvest Time

³¹ In the meantime, the disciples pressed him, "Rabbi, eat. Aren't you going to eat?"

³² He told them, "I have food to eat you know nothing about."

³³ The disciples were puzzled. "Who could have brought him food?"

³⁴⁻³⁵ Jesus said, "The food that keeps me going is that I do the will of the One who sent me, finishing the work he started. As you look around right now, wouldn't you say that in about four months it will be time to harvest? Well, I'm telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at what's right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It's harvest time!

³⁶⁻³⁸ "The Harvester isn't waiting. He's taking his pay, gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to harvest a field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others."

³⁹⁻⁴² Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Saviour of the world!" MSG

Last week we heard the story about Nicodemus' visit with Jesus from John 3:1–17 wherein Nicodemus learns that God so loved the world.....

Kathryn Matthews of the United Church of Christ, a partner and sister denomination of the United Church of Canada in the USA writes in the UCC 'Sermon Seeds' for Sunday March 15, 2020

https://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_march_15_2020 that:

Unlike Nicodemus who keeps saying, "How can this be?" this woman, out of a keen understanding of her own need and a marvelous openness to Jesus and all that he offers, asks, "Sir, give me this water!" MSG. Then Jesus shows her, in an interesting way, just how powerful he is.

He doesn't need an official position or an impressive outfit – he just tells her that he knows her, really knows all about her and her life. He doesn't judge her or tell her that she's welcome to the living water so that she can change her sinful ways.

An interfaith dialogue

As soon as the woman (we note that, while the name of Nicodemus is written down for us, this woman, like so many women in Scripture, remains nameless) – as soon as this woman grasps that Jesus is a prophet, for he knows "all that I have ever done," she doesn't worry about explaining or defending herself – instead, she engages him in a kind of "interfaith dialogue." Jesus talks theology *with a woman*.

She asks him about the most pressing question that divides the Jews and Samaritans – the hot-button religious issue that divides and alienates them and even makes them fear one another: where is the proper place to worship God? What are our our own hot-button issues today; what would you ask Jesus if you had the chance?)

The time is coming...

Jesus said "Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people God is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before God in their worship." MSG

Many of us in the [United Church of Canada] know profound gratitude and joy for the way God has accepted us and loved us and showered us with grace, no matter who we are or where we are on life's journey. Knowing God's grace, how many of us go out to the marketplace (remember where the men of the town are talking religion and politics?) and share the good news – Can it be? Is it too good to be true? Come and see!

Imperfect vessels of good news

Like the nameless woman at the well, maybe we're the least likely to be called to spread the good news. Most of us are not only not perfect, we're the wrong something, we're "other" in some way or another that would seem to disqualify us from being believed by the rest of the folks in town.

But this encounter with God through the Body of Christ, this extravagant hospitality and profound acceptance that we've experienced in our congregations, transforms our lives. Meeting one another and worshipping God together, simply and honestly, as our true selves, transforms our lives just as surely as meeting Jesus transforms the life of that solitary but spirited woman by the well.

Salvation as healing

We can view salvation as healing, too (as in "salve"). What needed to be healed in the Samaritan woman, and in her people? What needed to be healed in the disciples, who came upon the scene?

What needs to be healed in our congregation, in our community, in the families of our church and community, in the spirits of those who come to hear this good news? How do barriers between us and the other create a need for healing?

After reflecting on the differences between Nicodemus and this woman at the well, we might reflect on their similarities, too. Both, we might say, are seekers. What else do they share?

Coming to the well, thirsty

Many of us live apart from the wilderness and its deprivations, so water is plentiful and readily available to us. When was a time that you truly thirsted, for water, or for new life? Who are the people in your congregation who will recognize the rules and restrictions in this Gospel story more readily, and perhaps more painfully, than others will?

Who comes to "the community well" at a different, more uncomfortable time, than the rest of the community? Who experiences this isolation and loneliness? Who in your congregation truly thirsts for good news, for community, for salvation, for grace?

The dark of night and the brilliance of high noon. Bread and the harvest, water, salt, and light. Grace. Amen.

The above is interesting food for thought from Kathryn Matthews. I will add my own questions and interpretations to her thoughtful sermon seeds given the context of us here in Canada dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic on this the 15th of March 2020.

How would you react if Jesus appeared at your kitchen table or outside at your picnic table and asked you for a drink of water? Do you consider Jesus a personal friend and your personal Saviour? How much time would you need to process the fact that you are actually in conversation with Jesus? What question(s) would you ask Him? Who and how would you go off to tell about your conversation with Jesus? Would you tell anyone or keep it a secret? Could you keep it a secret?

During this season of Lent, we are counselled to combine fasting with prayer, to reflect inwardly about our relationship with Jesus, explore repentance and consider the ending of Lent with the resurrection of Jesus. Does the Samaritan woman's experience help calm you and give you something to relate to in considering how and what you would relate to Jesus if you physically met up with Him? And how about we use a name for this woman? In Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions, she is venerated as a saint with the name Photine (also Photini, **Photina**) meaning "the luminous one" from φως, "light".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan_woman_at_the_well

Material things, like water, food, and relationships with family and friends are just that – material and outwardly necessary for a biological life. But what about our inward selves? Our spiritual life? How do we replenish our spiritual self as we get worn down by media and social media reports, especially given the current pandemic, and our wanderings and ruminations in our own minds and hearts?

In the story about Photine and Jesus I can read in and hear (interpret) various attributes about Photine as she builds herself up, changes and gathers much self-confidence in this story as she converses with Jesus. Photine becomes more aware of herself as accepted by the Christ. She seems to relax and become more confident to the extent that she leaves her valuable water jug at the well and hastens back to her family and friends, her community, a separated community from the Jews and others, to joyfully exclaim about her finding the Messiah and that He, the Messiah, has taken a personal interest in her as a person, a child of God even, as an accepted and full member of the family of God. She came to the well in the heat of the day as an outcast, when others would not be there and

notice her and perhaps harass her. Photine came as a sinner due to living with a man who was not her husband and she came and, willingly or not, entered into a, shunned upon, personal and face to face (non-social distanced mind you) conversation with not just a man, but a Jewish man. I interpret that Photine left her water jar at Jacob's well and went back to her community with a sense of belonging, acceptance, love and full of hope. Indeed, "[b]ack in the village [Photine] told the people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?" MSG

In a world becoming more entrenched than ever in an isolated and 'unto ourselves' condition during this pandemic, this story involving Photine and Jesus gives us much hope and direction. It advises us to not give up hope. Photine was extremely unto herself and regarded as a pariah, an outcast essentially. But after that fateful conversation with Jesus at Jacob's well we hear about Jesus taking the personal time and effort to meet face to face with her, to affirm for her that there is much hope. From the Message John 4:23-24 we hear Jesus declare that:

the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration." MSG

Photine learns that Jesus accepts, loves her. Photine learns that by being herself, by being forthright, honest, and direct with Jesus, the Messiah, that by being honestly and dare I say vulnerable and simply who we are, warts and all, before God, that we are sought out and accepted by God as a full member of the family of Christ. There are no conditions or measured aspects of being in a relationship with Christ. We are in a personal, honest, loving, and of course accepted relationship with Christ. In this relationship we love Christ and He loves us. Full stop! What wonderful and good news. The grace of Jesus Christ is laid out as fresh and freely given, in the form of the living water of life for us to drink of and never be thirsty. From John 4:13-14 in the Message Jesus said,

“Everyone who drinks this [regular well] water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life”. MSG

As we withdraw into our seclusion from the Coronavirus and live the next unknown while in social exclusion/distancing, it is important to remember that we will get through this time of pandemic. We are well advised to follow the scientific and fact based information and guidance of healthcare professionals and to live our lives, yes somewhat differently due to the pandemic, but live our lives nonetheless, knowing that we do not live them alone. We can walk, talk and flourish in many ways during these potentially uncertain worldly times knowing that we are not alone. Indeed, we know this for our minister, Susan DeHaan, DLM reminds us often in her ministrations to us that we are not alone.

And we are not alone because we can simply and honestly, just as Photine experienced, enter into a prayerful and loving conversation at any time and any place with our personal friend and Saviour – Jesus the Christ.

Even in seclusion or through the experience of social distancing, we can reach out to family and friends and The Other, with loving compassion, understanding, and shared concern for the well-being of everyone.

By the simple, honest and meaningful actions of re-assurance inwardly for ourselves, and outwardly toward others of our thoughts and prayers for them during this time of pandemic and uncertainty, they will know that we are Christians by our love. Amen.

Significant reflection points and ‘food for thought’ were provided for this message in the UCC Sermon Seeds website for Sunday March 15, 2020 by *The Reverend Kathryn M. Matthews*. *Reverend Matthews retired in 2016 after serving as dean of [Amistad Chapel](#) at the national offices of the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio.*

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.