

A Conspiracy of Grace!

John 4:5–26 (27–30, 39–42)

Dear friends in Christ

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our meditation this morning is based on the gospel reading of John 4, where we see what this morning, I would call a Conspiracy of Grace! Jesus conspiring against the forces of death, by revealing himself as the provider of true water that infuses the dying soul with a new life.

The Samaritan woman in our Gospel reading is generally portrayed as a woman of bad reputation, a wanton, a floozy. With 5 husbands and living with a man who is not her husband can easily lead us into the conclusion that she was not someone with good morals. And the fact that John says that she was at the well at noon, when the sun it's at its highest point, in the heat of the day to bring water. Gives us the idea that she is avoiding people, perhaps she is ashamed of what she has done and doing that she is avoiding judging eyes. Some have concluded that when Jesus meets her at the well, he confronts her with her sins. She does recognize them and upon trusting Jesus, her life changes, even shares her happiness with the rest of the community, that many even believed too.

Now that might be true, except that the people in the community had no trouble in hearing her calling and pointing to Jesus as the possible prophet they were expecting, and if that is the case, then it could be that there is more to the story, more than being a floozy. Perhaps is not a "she" problem, but a "he" problem, the men she had married previously. Maybe she had been a victim of abandonment and divorce. Back in those days, men were entitled to divorce their wives as they wished, and under any excuses. Maybe her cooking was the problem, or maybe she wasn't able to bear children. John doesn't say. Perhaps she was a widow, maybe one or two or more of her husbands had died, perhaps from sickness, accident or even war. Whatever the reason she was left on her own, we don't know. What we know is that during that time it was difficult for a widow or a divorced woman to care for herself, the care and support of a man was needed, that explains why she had to marry 5 times.

And the man she was living with at that time, as Jesus points that out to her. Might not even be a boyfriend she was living with as may also have concluded. It could have been that she was living with a distant relative or in some other undesirable arrangement in order to survive. In her Aramaic speaking culture, it was important for a woman to have a male protector around her at every stage of her life. These protector males, called "gowra" in Aramaic (from a root meaning "strength")

could be a male cousin, uncle, or other guardian responsible to take care of her. Again, John doesn't say that, all he tells us is that Jesus pointing that out to her.

Now, if that was the case, that it wasn't her fault she had 5 husbands, imagine the emotional burden she was carrying. If she was dismissed in divorce, or unable bear children, or being widow several times, imagine the guilt, the shame, the depression, the mental and emotional anguish she was experiencing. Those things can be strong reasons for her to avoid people on the way or at the well, to bring water.

Now, it is possible that the community could understand a bit her pain, that didn't dismiss her as a wanton, a woman of bad repute, that when she called them and tell them of Jesus, they didn't reject her, but perhaps they were intrigued by her change, by her excitement, after all she was avoiding them all this time.

But the reason of her change, was certainly Jesus, who came to encounter her at the well. And what an encounter it was! Because of the one who came to encounter her, and the location where this happened.

Let me explain. The well is in the vicinity of the burial place of Joseph's bones. We remember Joseph, Jacob's Son, the one who became second in command in Egypt and who saved his people from starvation. The Bible tells us that "As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem." (Joshua 24:32a). This immediately hints at a connection between the Samaritan woman's story and Joseph's story. Both didn't have it easy. If the Samaritan woman's story is not a "she" problem, then surely Joseph and the woman, have something in common. Their lives were marked by suffering and pain. And something else too, that their suffering, each of their sufferings brought forth the same result in the end – the salvation of their people. Only the Samaritan's story is about redemption, the redemption the Samaritans and the Jews were waiting for.

Now, here is Jesus, having a conversation with a Samaritan woman, at the well. This conversation bears all the marks of deep theological engagement on both sides. To start with, the woman knows that according to the traditions of Judean Israelites, Jesus would be ritually contaminated if he were to use a cup, or a dish, anything that belonged to a Samaritan woman, even the simple fact of talking with her, was already a precarious condition for the Jew. I'm sure that caught the woman by surprise, so he challenges Jesus..... "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" V. 9b

The Samaritans believed themselves to be the faithful remnant of Israel, preserving the original Mosaic and Abrahamic traditions. In fact, the word Samaritan itself means the "Guardians of Torah."

They considered themselves the protectors of the God's Laws, and that the true place of worship is there, near where they were, Mount Gerizim. In contrast the Jews believed that the Temple in Jerusalem was the true worship place. And considered Samaritans as corruptors of the Jewish faith, not only because of their rejection of Jerusalem but because they only accepted the Five Books of Moses.

Both had their own strong opinions and reasons, but soon enough all of that was going to come to an end.

A new Temple will come to be, a temple that is marked by "living water" and the true worship in "Spirit and Truth." And in Jesus we find the True Temple, true worship, for in him we are born again, through the work of water and the spirit, forming a people, a new Israel that would become the church, the Bride, and Jesus the Groom.

Jesus is the "gift of God" that is now talking to the woman. The gift of God is not something conjured or done by Samaritan's good works. And this gift of God is equally for everyone who is thirsty for life, thirsty for the truth, thirsty for comfort and peace.

If the common view of the Samaritan woman to be a wanton and a floozy stands, Jesus doesn't come to condemn her here, or dismiss her here because of her condition. No, Jesus didn't side with the Jews or the Samaritans. No, the conservative Jesus didn't say she is a sinner therefore she must be stoned to death, as the Law of the pharisees required. No, Jesus didn't say, nobody in her community cares, so why should I. Or, I'm a Jew and she a Samaritan, and a woman for that matter, what would people say if I talk to her? Nothing of that, instead, Jesus, reacted, conspired against the culture and traditions of her time. He conspired against all the established way of thinking and the social norms of that time, he showed to the woman, what probably no body has shown her ever, grace. If her sins were so great, so was God's grace. If her sins kept her apart from everybody else, grace brought her a new light, the light of the Living Water.

But if it wasn't a she problem, but a man's problem, still Jesus came to her to calm her fears, to give her hope, to eradicate her shame, to restore her image, and to give her joy, the joy she hasn't experienced perhaps in a long time. He came to give living water so she would drink and worship in spirit and in truth, he came to remove her sins and her pain.

Now, no Jesus didn't destroy the woman because she was a sinner, but didn't condone her actions either. Instead confronted her with her condition, her sins, her actions, changing her way of thinking, focusing her mind and her heart to the "Gift of God", to Jesus the Messiah. The one speaking with her that precise moment, offering her "The water ... that becomes...a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Showing her all that she ever did, and offering her living water, were enough for the woman to start believing unto redemption, and this, this she went and announced in her community. She left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him."

Up and down the streets she shared the good news about Jesus, for she had seen the Lord, the Messiah! Having received the living water, a perpetual spring within her that gave her eternal life (v. 14), she wanted others to know him too.

This Man, Jesus, comes to us today. To all the Samaritan today, out there and here. Whatever your loads, whatever the bondage, whatever your burdens you are carrying, whatever your sins, whatever your oppression, Jesus comes to you too. He meets you there, in the silence of your hearts, in the retreat places where you want to be alone your burden, there Jesus comes to you. He confronts you too with your reality, he doesn't come to condemn you or to agree with your choices or your way of thinking, instead he points you to the springs of living water. He conspires for you too, here, today. He conspires against the status quo you are facing, and shows you lots of grace and mercy.

He changes our way of thinking too. He takes us beyond our understandings of God, our misconception of him, his church, or even the cultural practices of our day, and brings us to the new light of his salvation, bringing us to a new worship, a worship that is in spirit and truth, meaning that concentrates on Jesus alone, for he is the one who incites our worship as he meets at the well.

He doesn't argue with us, instead, he patiently teaches us the beauty of the Good News of and of heaven itself. Just as he saw into her heart of the Samaritan woman, and addressed the pain of her failed relationships with men and the need she had to be forgiven and loved, or the restitution of what was taken from her, so too he comes to us. Addressing our pain, our hearts, and brings us into the freedom of his word, so we can worship in Spirit and in Truth, in him, for he is the Temple, and we, his redeemed people are the new Israel.

Now, we too, can go to others and share that joy we receive in Christ, we too can share with others that yes, there is a new Conspirator in Town, only his conspiracy is real, he conspires against the power of death, through the gift of his grace, showering upon us his mercy.

He did conspire indeed! And he conspired with his own life. He did at the Cross where he gave his life for us. After suffering so much, even death, on the third day rose from the death, becoming our salvation, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, where the channels of Salvation for their people, but Jesus, Jesus became indeed our Savior.

In Him we can say, we do worship, we worship in Spirit and Truth indeed!

In his name, amen.