

John 4:1-30

2nd Sunday in Lent

March 11, 1990

I remember when the teddy bear people came to town. At first there were three of them, two women and a man, dressed in rags, carrying what looked to be all their earthly possessions, including one well worn teddy bear. Our house was right on highway U.S. Highway 12 therein Hettinger North Dakota. These three people would wander up and down the highway, and across it. In that small town of 1600 people, most everyone was wondering who they were, where they came from, what they were doing here.

Sunday morning came and so did two of them to worship, Melvin carrying his teddy bear, and Jean, his sister. Anyone who was near them that morning, learned that it was not simply their clothes that were dirty, they stunk. In the next weeks and months I learned a lot about them from their landlord and people who worked in law enforcement and social welfare agencies. The whole southwestern part of North Dakota knew them under various names. Seeking welfare benefits in a number of different communities at the same time, leaving towns just as their creditors were closing in, moving out of apartments they left in shambles, yes they had quite a name.

But in those months that they lived among us they joined our church, heard the word, received the sacrament. And constantly left me with the feeling that I ought to be doing something to change them, clean them up, get them on the straight and narrow. Then one day they were gone, and quite frankly, I was relieved.

In our second lesson this morning, buried in the middle of all those words about Abraham, and works and faith, our God is described as the one who justifies the ungodly. He takes people who stink to high heaven, and regards them as spotless and clean. He takes the ungodly, cheaters and frauds, and receives them as the most noble. in our lesson ~~that our God is described as the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. like righteousness in the unrighteous~~ / He takes a woman despised by the world, and offers her his salvation.

She's been married five times. Even in this day and age today, that statement would raise some eyebrows. What sort of a woman is this who changes husbands as others might change clothes? And she's not even married to the one she's <sup>As it was with</sup> living with now. ~~Like~~ the teddy bear people, I would feel I should be doing something to change her, make her more acceptable, godly.

But that was only one of the strikes she had against her, she was also a Samaritan. When Jesus spoke to her, she asked, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

And there was one more thing against ~~the~~ her. She was a she. We read that when Jesus disciples returned, they marveled that he was talking with a woman. Jesus world was a man's world, a world where women and Samaritans and sinners were all to be avoided. <sup>unworthy.</sup> Regarded as ~~worthless~~

But it was to her that Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. It was to her that Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. It was this woman who was a Samaritan and a sinner who said, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Jesus offered her salvation. Knowing who she was, even before she told him knowing all about her husbands, her life, Jesus offered her living water. In that village on that day, she was the one to whom he revealed himself, <sup>Louise said, I know that the Messiah is coming.</sup> telling her that he was the Messiah, the Christ. <sup>from said, who speak to you on the</sup>

As I came to this text this week, I realized that whenever I have considered the woman at the well, I have made one assumption. I have always assumed that she went home from her encounter with Jesus and straightened out her life. I have assumed that she who had been ungodly, now became godly. Just as I assumed that when the word of God did its work with the teddy bear people, that they would take a bath, and settle their debts and settled down into respectable living.



But the scriptures say not a word of any such thing happening. Jesus did not say, "If you stop living with this man, or if you get married to him, then you may have living water." Not more than he said, If you cease to be a Samaritan or if you cease to be a woman, then I will offer you salvation. Nor did Paul write about the god who makes the ungodly godly, but of the God who justifies the ungodly,

This woman did not go back to the village and tell everyone how she was going to change, she went and told them, "Come, ~~and~~ see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? Even her witness ~~is~~ is kind of weak. Jesus had told her that he was the Christ, but she was only able to ask, "Can this be the ~~Christ~~ Christ?"

Yet we are told, "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritan came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there ~~two~~ <sup>two</sup> days. And many more believed because of his ~~works~~ <sup>word</sup>. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

*Of all the people in that town, Jesus chose the one most ~~likely~~ <sup>likely</sup> ungodly as his witness*  
~~The ungodly one was Jesus witness in that place.~~ She did not have all the words down right, she simply told about Jesus, God did all the rest.

Sometimes I wonder why I don't know more peace within myself. I try so very hard, people say I do well, I work to get all the words right, all the deeds right.

Deep down inside, I have difficulty believing in the God who justifies the ungodly. The teddy bear people, the woman at the well, surely all my trying and giving means that I have something before God that they don't have. wrong.

To be a Christian means to have only Christ. Teddy bear people, and ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> the well, and preachers are all on equal ground when Christ is all

that counts. Knowing all the right words, taking a bath every night, having fifty years of faithful marriage, none of these gives us a higher place in the kingdom. But Christ grants to all who hear <sup>believe</sup> his word his living water. Male of female, Samaritan or Jew, adulterer, or welfare cheater, <sup>repents</sup> every ungodly one he is waiting to embrace.