

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent

'Is the Lord among us or not?'

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The Hebrews had been a godless nation for generation upon generation, both those Hebrews who returned from the exile in Babylon, whom we call Jews, and those who were spared, and remained in the Holy Land, who were known as Samaritans.

Their God had hidden Himself from them for the sin of their idolatry, for they had become harlots, whoring after pagan gods.

To those who were carried off by Babylon, they repented of their ways, and committed themselves to the one true God, a God who had, for them, become far off.

To those who remained, they made peace with the pagan gods, adding them as demigods in their pantheon beneath the one God of the Bible, believing that by doing so, they have given all glory to the true God, while honoring the lesser deities of the heathen.

But to honor God as one among the idols, even the greatest among them, is to honor God none at all; for *our God is a jealous God. And beside him, there is no other.*

Therefore, God knew not the Samaritans, even as He hid himself from the Jews.

To all the children of Israel, those who were exiled, and those who remained, they worshipped a God who would not be worshipped by them. They waited for a God who had forsaken them. They longed for a God whom they had driven off. Driven off by their own will, by their own greed. They desired what the idols of stone and wood promised, and so rejected the promises of the Lord, which were not things

of prosperity and plenty, but things of suffering and patience. For this is God's will, that since He does suffer for us, and waits for our penitence with patience, so too would He have us, in imitation of Him, suffer and wait.

And yet *we would not*. For, among sinful mortals, gratification of our lusts in time always claims victory over the joy of man's desire in eternity. [So we chose the futility of this aimless wandering.]

For this reason, the Father *gave them over to their degrading passions*. And they were alone. And God was no longer among them.

Our Lord comes to the land of Samaria, and grows weary, for *He was made man*. Stopping at a well, a well dug by the patriarch Jacob, He rests.

A Samaritan woman comes to Him. He asks of her water. The woman responds: *'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?'* Our Lord responds: *'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.'*

The woman does not know how to respond, for there is nothing with which to draw the water. So she asks, reasonably, where she might find 'living water', which was an idiom of the time which meant 'flowing water', that is, water which comes forth from a spring.

Jesus, as is His custom, does not answer her question, but responds with a riddle.

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

We see curiosity upon curiosity, for Him who is thirsty not only claims to know where *living water* may be found, but claims that He Himself is the font.

Without waiting for a response from the Samaritan, Jesus commands her, *'Go, call your husband, and come here.'*

She responds, *'I have no husband.'*

Our Lord answers, *'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had*

five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.'

What follows is an enigma that demands unravelling. The woman does not strike back with outrage, nor correct Christ about her marital status, nor stomp off as one offended, nor defend her chastity.

Behold the words of her saying: *'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.'*

At first glance, this is the strangest of responses. When accused of promiscuity with many men, why reply with a question about proper liturgical worship practices?

It is because she understands what we do not. She knows what we fail to see. We see here Christ accusing her of adultery. In fact, Christ convicts her of idolatry.

When the Lord says that she has *five husbands*, He refers not to mortal men, but to the gentile gods which she has married herself to, and in so doing, has lost her first God, the God of Israel.

And this God of Israel, this Lord of all the Heavens [and the Earth], is now before her, offering living water. It is this God, this Christ, that is *the one before you who is not your husband*. Who is not her God.

For this reason, the Lord does not rebuke her, but responds, *'What you have said is true.'*

Her first God, the God of her ancestors, whom she and her kin have forsaken, now stands before her, and she asks the most pious question she rightly could: *'Where shall people worship you?'*

The Lord's answer: *'Neither on this mount, nor in Jerusalem, but they shall worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father seeks such people to worship him.'*

The God who left His people to their iniquity now returns to them who have toiled in loneliness. And not only has He returned, but He seeks, even seeks an idolater, a Samaritan. Who then, shall He not seek? Having left the ninety-nine, the endless

ranks of the angels of heaven, He now seeks the one lost: Adam, and His blighted children. We, the lost sons of Adam, who wander in exile here. [Who thirst for *living water*.]

'God recalls his promises.' And now, so does the Samaritan woman, for hearing that the Father has come to seek the lost, even the adulterous; even the idolater, one can see her breath the broken sigh of one bereft of all hope, cut off from all rescue, yet who has just heard that, maybe, just maybe, redemption might, after all human faithlessness and falsehood, come for lost humanity; this sigh of which sees the savior rising upon the edge of the mount as the morning dawn, and whispers.

'I know that the Messiah is coming.'

'Is the Lord among us, or not?'

'And Jesus said to her'

'I who speak to you, am he.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-8; John 4:5-26.