Text: John 4:5-26

**Introduction**

If you were part of our midweek bible study, honestly, I didn’t plan to have a preview of today’s gospel text. So I’m sorry for a bit of the repeat. But hopefully the emphasis is a little different.

**Literal**

For those of you who were not in that bible study, there is a bit of OT background that I think you need to have to get the scene in the gospel text. Part of it simply because when we normally read the Bible, we come at it assuming a high register. Shakespeare or any work in the Canon has the same problem. We think because they have stood the test of time and serious people find them worth studying, their subjects must be elevated. When more often then not the thing that made them classics to begin with was how they captured a truth about lived life. The elevated meanings came from repeated contemplation. From nerds like me saying, oh, there is a lot more to this story.

I that Wednesday bible study we were actually studying the Patriarch Jacob. And Jacob meets Rachel – the great romantic character of Israel – at a well. Jacob peacocks around. Takes his shirt off and moves a massive boulder covering the well. And plants a kiss on the most beautiful woman he’s ever seen in his 18 years of life. Which will all lead to 14 years of service and a lifetime of sisterly competition. But Jacob’s well scene is only one of several in the OT. Two other big ones are Abraham’s servant finds a wife for Isaac – Rebekah - at a well, and Moses finds his wife Zipporah at the well. It’s not perfect, but you could say well stories are bar stories. They are the Rom-Com meet cute stories of the time.

So when a story teller starts telling a story that “Jesus came to a town of Samaria…Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.” The hearer is primed for a love story or at least a story of romance and marriage. Which is a much lower and perhaps bawdier register than we much later readers would ever project onto Jesus.

But before we make the jump from low to high, I think that expected background helps to hear a bit of the scandal and fun of the story John is telling. “There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.” Here is the meeting, and Jesus does ask her for a drink. But then things kinda go sideways. Unlike Rebekah, this lady is having none of it. “You, a Jew, ask me – a woman of Samaria – for a drink?” John recognizes that the enmity between Jews and Samaritans might not be known so he tells us. But Jesus replies with something that just might be the all time pick’up line. “If you knew the gift of God and who is asking you, you would have asked me, and he’d have given you living water.”

But this particular woman is having none of it – no thanks, stop. “You have nothing to draw water, the well is deep, and just who do you think you are. Are you better then Jacob who gave us this well?” Ok scrub, buzz-off.

But Jesus doesn’t seem to be one to take an immediate no for an answer. “Look, this water from this well, everyone will be thirsty again. The water I will give, you will have your own well bubbling up to eternal life.”

And the woman, at least in my reading – you are in no way bound to how I read it – a little incredulous at the persistence of this strange Jew says more or less, “ok, show me what you got. Sir, give me this water.”

Of course what Jesus has is not the conclusion to the Rom-Com, at least not in the physical sense. What Jesus has is a marriage of sorts, but that’s getting ahead of ourselves. Because the story does jump registers. “Go, call your husband.”

It’s a strange question for a well scene. But maybe he’s just being scrupulous. Whatever, I’ll take that worry away. “I have no husband.”

At which Jesus tells the woman her entire romantic history. Which is almost as sad as that of Jacob and Leah and Rachel which was started long ago at this well. And at that everybody realizes they are not in the story they thought. “I perceive that you are a prophet.”

And now it’s the woman that is not willing to let it go.

**Christology**

If you know you have a prophet, “what question do you ask?” There is an old pop song that asks something like that. What if God was one of us…what would you ask if you had just one question?...would you want to see, if seeing meant that you had to believe?

That old one is a little more direct, but a theologian by the name of Paul Zahl, is probably more scandalous than my Rom-Com reading of this scene. He’s got a pet theory about almost all pop songs. Underneath the Saturday Night Fever and Silly Love Songs, is all a longing. It is just safer to express that longing as one for sex, or physical love, or all the things you find in pop songs. Of course the longing is actually for the living water. The water that won’t need another song, because after 3 mins and 30 secs I’m tired of this one.

Joan Osborne used the “Yeah, Yeahs” and the form of the pop song, but asked what Paul Zahl says they all do. What would you ask?

I suppose there are different forms of the one question we’d ask. And the form of the question depends upon where we are in our faith walk. The Samaritan woman is at the very start. Here question is “where?” Where do I meet God? Our tradition says here. Of course our tradition has led me through 5 husbands and one live in…You Jews say we go to Jerusalem. Where do I go?

And Jesus’s answer gives both an anchor and some wings. Where do we meet God?

The anchor – “salvation is from the Jews”. This story of Israel, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Of Moses and the Prophets. Of David and the Kingdom and exile. Of the waiting for the messiah and the fulfillment of the promise. This story is necessary. God has chosen to act in this story. Every meeting of God in truth flows from this story.

“But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth.” The Spirit is the wings. If all the story is, is letters – that is not where one meets God. The letter kills, the spirit gives life. The story is necessary and true, but your word, sentence, chapter of the story must be written by the same Spirit that wrote those. And we don’t know where the spirit will blow. But we are invited to fly on the wings of faith. Do you want to see?

The Samaritan woman risks one more question. She wanted to see. “I know messiah is coming…”. “I am he.”

Quite an ending for a guy who started off boasting “If you knew who asked you.”

Where do we meet God? In the person of Jesus. Here is the fulfillment of the story of Israel. Firmly anchored in everything God has done. Here is the one the Spirit anointed and testifies to.

**Moral**

“The Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

What does it mean to worship? I’ve never found anything better than the catechism’s answer. To fear, love and trust. Worship has an outward form. Whether that is on this mountain, or in that temple, or with this song. And the form connects us to the truth. If it doesn’t something has gone wrong. But worship is not just the forms. Worship is the heart stuff. Does the fear of a Holy God reside in our hearts? Does the love of God more than assuage that fear without chasing is our? Even through fear because of love are we willing to trust our very lives to this Christ?

The Father is seeking such people.

**Eschatological**

I said that the story was a marriage of sorts. The Samaritan women met God that day. On the day the soul meets God, that is the day the lover meets the beloved. Because God does love all his creation. The day the soul meets God is a day of a question that needs a response.

And marriage is the only human institution that I think comes close to that experience of fear love and trust. Anyone getting married who isn’t a bit afraid isn’t really getting married. Making a pledge of faithfulness for all time should cause fear. Because neither of you are going to be the same person in a year, let alone 20. And regardless of what the world says today, men and women are different. Not as great as the difference between God and mankind. But that difference should cause a holy fear. Without losing the fear, does love abide and give courage to the union? Enough that daily – whatever may come – we trust our lives to this relationship?

Now marriage is a temporal thing. But our temporal marriages are images of something eternal. The union of Christ and the church. The coming of the Kingdom is called the marriage feast of the lamb. The church is the collection of all those people that the Father is seeking. Those who have met Jesus and placed eternal trust in his word.

Today, here, under the forms of bread and wine. Under the forms of word and sacrament we meet God. And all of these ask a question that needs a response. Is this the one we fear, love and trust above all things?