

FRANKLIN CONGREGATIONAL-CHRISTIAN CHURCH, UCC
Sermon for Sunday, March 12, 2023 – Third Sunday of Lent
MY STORY
John 4: 5-42

I've had a strange life. You've probably heard parts of it, but from my point of view, this is the real deal. I have no name – well of course I have a name. But through the ages you Christians have made up many odd, and sometimes not very nice, things about me - so I'm happy to remain anonymous. You call me the Samaritan Woman – like I was the only woman from Samaria? Really! There were quite a lot of us. But that's often the way you tend to dismiss groups you look down on – Asian Women, Black Women, Indigenous Women, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Iraqi, Moroccan, Algerian women – women from various African Tribes – how much effort do you make to tell us apart? Jesus was in Samaria after all, wouldn't you expect to find Samaritans here?

Next, you call me the woman at the well. Well, that's like saying the woman at the grocery store. Yesterday I was taken to your Market Basket – unbelievable! How do you eat so much food? And you buy water in bottles – no well for you. I think I like your grocery store – but most of all I like when the fish monger rinsed off the fish before wrapping it up – Water from a metal pipe! Back in my day women went to the town well to get water – there was nothing unusual about that.

Some of your people, commentators I think you call them – make a big deal about me being alone at the well. They seem to think I'm an outcast in my village because I was there by myself. And it's true, we women mostly go out together in the morning and evening when it's cooler – it makes the work less burdensome when we can chat and sing together. But still, we all go out now and again during the day – sometimes we need some more water after cleaning and cooking, but

sometimes we just want to get away and be alone for a bit. We trade off caring for the kids and go off to the well alone. The men think we just didn't plan well, and we let them think that – but we know the truth.

I'm trying to tell you I'm no outcast – the women and the men of the village like me and respect me. Why wouldn't they? My hospitality is generous – I do my share of the work. Indeed, even in your story it's clear that I'm respected. The people all listened to me when I came back to tell them about Jesus – and they followed me to see for themselves. They wouldn't do that if I was an outcast. Your commentators aren't very consistent – making me an outcast, then having the villagers listen to me! I think they're like the disciples who didn't see why Jesus should talk with a woman.

Your commentators also make a big deal about my husbands. You seem to think I've behaved shamelessly – but didn't you know, Jesus was just showing me he was a prophet – how else could he do this except by telling me about my life? He didn't think I was dirty or evil. That's your perception. That's part of why I'm here today setting the record straight – setting my story straight. That was the beginning of our theological discussion – we just weren't talking about me – Jesus was talking with me about the 5 gods of Samaria, the gods of my place. To give them credit, some of your commentators do get that part right.

I'll come back to the theological discussion - but first, I want you to think about the story you heard. Just as Peter and Andrew, James and John in your gospels left their boats and nets, so I left my water jug. Just as Andrew heard Jesus and then went to get Simon Peter saying, "we have found the Messiah;" Just as Philip found Nathanael and said, "we have found him about whom Moses in the law wrote, so I went and told all my neighbors about this man who could be the Messiah. And

because of my witness, the whole village came out and met Jesus and heard for themselves – and came to believe he was God’s holy child. But first of all, it was because of my words they believed. One of your commentators in fact, calls me the first successful missionary! I like that recognition.

But now I’ve got all that out of the way, what I really want to talk about with you is my discussion with Jesus. For that’s the real point – the Good News about the Messiah, the One who brings us ‘living water.’ I’m just one of many women and men who have told the world about Jesus.

Actually, many commentators, even Jesus’ male disciples in the story, seem to be struck by the fact that Jesus was even talking with me – a woman of Samaria! From the Jewish perspective, I’m one of those despicable, unclean Samaritans. From the perspective of the Jewish religious leaders, I’m especially unclean because I’m a female! But that’s to look at my story from their perspective. As a Samaritan, I think the Jews, even Jesus sometimes, are funny uptight people – concerned with their own specialness before God – remember what Jesus said to the Syrophenician women about Gentiles being dogs? – Yet Jesus is here, at my well, a Samaritan well, asking me for water! This female impurity stuff is all male hoopla, men’s ideas. Men are just as much physical bodies as we women – and I think God created our bodies as much as theirs.

But back to the discussion with Jesus – the real point of our discussion is about where God is worshipped. We began talking about whether it is Jerusalem as the Jews believe – or the mountain of Samaria as we Samaritans believe. Jesus said the time was coming, is already here, when God is to be worshipped without regard to place – that God could

be worshipped anywhere – not just in some special designated place. I rather like that odd translation you used today – “God is not tied to a place;” to worship God truly is to worship without regard to place.

The Greek text reads that to Worship God as God truly is, is to worship **“in Spirit and truth.”** I expect the Jews in their Temple, thought they were worshipping God in Spirit and truth. I know we Samaritans thought we were in our sacred spaces. But Jesus taught that God is not tied to a place – be it Jerusalem, Rome, or Franklin, NH. Jesus taught that the ‘living water’ – the fountain of real life is available to us all everywhere.

Of course, true worship does occur here – But that’s not the point. It doesn’t *only* occur here, or even especially here. It occurs inside and outside of churches, denominations and even what we think of as religions. Neither the Jews or Samaritans nor other faiths have a special claim to worship in more ‘Spirit and truth’ than any other faith. God makes the offer of eternal life to us all.

I was warned, you are very individualistic now – I’m not saying that worship is an individual matter – I’m saying that communities worship God, without regard to time or place and any attempt to establish a place as better or truer or more spiritual, is really about human pride – about humans putting God’s living water, the true fountain of life offered to us all – and I, a woman of Samaria, invite you wherever you are, to drink deeply of God’s living water – to enjoy and rejoice in the satisfying water given by God, for it is life. Thank you for listening to me this morning. Amen.