

Sermon – The woman at the Well and Kintsukoroi pots

Lent 3 year A - John 4.5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, '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 said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.' Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

In our Gospel today is a Samaritan woman sitting alone in the heat and then Jesus starts talking to her. Not only does he chat with a woman (a big no-no in the culture of the time) - not only does he chat with a woman who is an ethnic outsider (a bigger no-no) - not only does he chat with a woman who is an ethnic outsider who has had 5 husbands (there aren't enough nos for that one) but – and this is a huge thing to notice – this is by far the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in all of the Gospels and this woman is the first character in John's gospel to seek out others to tell them about Jesus.

Today's story is profoundly important... for our Christian faith and for us...

Many have assumed that this Samaritan woman with many husbands went to the well in the middle of the day because she was some kind of prostitute – which to be honest is a leap and says more about how women have been understood over time rather than this woman's actual story and identity...

This woman's story does however speak of brokenness – although we don't know entirely what that is about...

We can speculate about why she had been married so often – maybe she was a teen bride widowed and passed along through a line of her elderly husband's elderly brothers or maybe she was divorced for being infertile. The least likely possibility is that she lured men into her trap, killed them after a year of marriage and just kept getting away with it. It is honestly hard to understand why such an important woman in our faith became known as a whore in tradition – although our conversation about Eve a couple of weeks ago maybe helps us reconsider these attitudes – what we do have in her story - what we can see is that she has been broken – whether self-inflicted or inflicted by others or some combination of the two, her life is complicated and broken.... All of those husbands paint a picture of brokenness – whatever the story behind that...

Brokenness...

A bit like this...



A bit like us....

Perhaps when things in life feel like they are falling apart we feel like these pots – broken and messy

Perhaps we are struggling to keep ourselves together as we feel pain and loss?

Perhaps our lives are not the way we think or hope they should be?

The Samaritan Woman was at the well at noon – an anti-social time to get water – she clearly didn't want to be seen by anyone. For whatever reason...

The thing that has really struck me about reading this story again in readiness for this sermon – is when Jesus offers this woman the living water and she says give me this living water he asks about her husband. Jesus is very direct with her and gets to the heart of the matter – the difficulty – her brokenness – he offers her eternal life but he doesn't shy away from the truth of her life.

It isn't a gloopy glossy eternal life - it is real.

To stop trying to quench our thirst with things that will never satisfy us and to have eternal life – our start point is being seen. It starts with the truth – the naked truth of what and who we are – the truth of everything – of our shame and our beauty – of every good and bad thing about us – of ourselves – of our story.

We are to be seen as we truly are however broken – whatever our story...

Water sinks into the lowest point – it sinks into our lowest points too.... Jesus' love sinks into the lowest most broken points of our lives.

We tend to spend a lot of energy trying to hide from the truth... We try to present ourselves to the world without our flaws – we often tell stories of ourselves which are positive – we struggle to admit our weaknesses – we rarely stop and stand in the light of our truth so that our brokenness, our damage, our wounds, our difficulties, our pain - are seen – by us or by anyone else. To be real is too messy and embarrassing and shameful – it is much easier to gloss over the cracks with a shiny exterior...

I have heard faith being described not as intellectual or adhering to a set of dogmas, but as relaxing. I love this idea – faith is relaxing in the love and presence of God – think of the way we relax in the presence of someone we are confident really loves us. That feeling of complete at home – ness...

When we are in the presence of someone we are certain loves us, we are funnier, more spontaneous, softer and less defended. We are more truly ourselves – we let them see all of us - If I know for sure someone likes and loves me there is no reason to pretend anything – it is easier to be just me. Do you know what that feels like?

I rather think this relaxing faith is what happened to the woman at the well. I think living water found a way through her defence system and the water trickled into her lowest point, her deepest wound, her greatest need. She left her pot and went out – to be seen and heard as she told of her encounter.

Our greatest wounds, our deepest shame – the things we would rather not be seen – these can also be our greatest gift our greatest beauty.

Have you heard of the Japanese art of Kintsukuroi?

This is an ancient practice – where pottery when broken is mended not with a camouflaged glue but a special adhesive mixed with gold or silver so that the cracks can be seen and bring a new beauty to the pot... that they are more beautiful for having been broken...



KINTSUKUROI



"to repair with gold"; the art of repairing pottery with gold or silver lacquer and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken.

In our Eucharist – we always break the bread – breaking is needed to share what we have – breaking happened when Jesus died on the cross – breaking happens in all of our lives to enable new things to flourish ...

Like the Kintsukuroi pots and like the woman at the well - we are broken and made anew in God's love – we can be made more beautiful in our brokenness if we allow God's living water into our lowest points and we accept God's healing love into our lives.

Amen