



## “Stilling Our Restlessness”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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### Scripture (NRSV):

#### *John 4*

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

**4** Now when Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”<sup>2</sup> —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—<sup>3</sup> he left Judea and started back to Galilee. **4** But he had to go through Samaria. **5** **So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.**

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9** **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.)**<sup>[b]</sup> **10** 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.” **11** The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** **Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”** **13** Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> 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.” **15** 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.**”

**16** Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” **17** The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” **19** The woman said to him, “**Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you**<sup>[c]</sup> **say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.**” **21** Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will

**worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.** <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.** <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am he, <sup>[d]</sup> the one who is speaking to you.”

<sup>27</sup> **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?” <sup>28</sup> **Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,** <sup>29</sup> “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, <sup>[e]</sup> can he?” <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.

## Sermon:

There is so much going on in the gospel of John. It makes me want to sit down with you and have a long conversation over a good meal. Ask questions, dig around in the stories! How can anyone do justice to the stories, the relentless pace of the stories of Jesus in the gospel of John? Nicodemus? The healing at Cana?

This morning I asked Ed to read selections from one story in the fourth chapter of the gospel, and even so it is a long and suggestive passage.

What shall your preacher pastor share with you today? The story is full of the tricky wisdom of Jesus, and his radical overturning of the status quo, his new vision of a world beyond the temple cult in Jerusalem, and the Samaritan cult at Gerezim, too! Shall we discuss the relationship between woman and man that is so different? Shall we discuss the taboos of Samaritan and Jew? A world beyond marriage and divorce and insider/outsider status in town and village and world? Shall we discuss the new vision of God’s Spirit blowing through the world, beyond our power and beyond our reach, only to be known by observing Jesus’ followers speaking of the Spirit of God, which is truth and love and joy?

That woman!

What is she doing, out there at noon, getting water alone when everyone else is in town, fixing a meal already? Is she afraid of the scorn of her neighbors and seeking a little respite by going to the well when she knows that no one else will be there?

That woman! She is so smart, she is so impertinent, she is so curious and quick! She is restless and clever, holding her own in conversation with a strange man, talking theology

and common sense both! “Where’s your bucket; when will the Messiah come; what is the worship that God desires?”

She has a snappy come back for it all!

But she is not happy.

Not the least bit happy.

I sense in her conversation a restlessness, a hurt, a yearning.

I intuit from the many men she has known and cast off in her life a discontent, a dissatisfaction that is unanswered.

But by the time she has finished her convoluted conversation with Jesus, she is excited beyond belief, she is fearless in returning to Sychar and telling all those nose, judgmental neighbors all about this unique individual she has met at the well.

Something is satisfied, something has changed, profoundly changed for her.

What can it be?

Is it that Jesus is smart and fearless, unconcerned about convention and the small-minded judgments of others?

Is it his theological message of the freedom of the Spirit of God and liberation from the confinements of temple rules and regulations?

It is even more than that?

- Can it be that in Jesus she has finally met a messenger of God’s love and joy, rather than God’s judgment?
- Can it be that in Jesus she has finally found a person of such vision and such great integrity that there is no condemnation, but rather the challenge to live her fullest life and celebrate every part of her vast creative, restless, energetic self?
- Can it be that finally, she has been overcome by peace, and the joy that comes when one is truly known, loved and affirmed?
- To be fully accepted, to be deeply known and understood: how we hunger for this! How we hunger to be recognized, and how we are twisted when that recognition of our innate worth and beauty is denied! We grow up to be angry, or violent, or cruel, or depressed, or restless, or unhappy.
- Somehow, at that well, beyond the conversation about water and spirit, the Spirit of God, the beauty of God, the love of God, came pouring through Jesus to this woman, and suddenly she knew she was treasured, she was understood. “Come and see”, she tells the people of Sychar, “a man who knows everything I ever did.”

At last, at last, the restlessness of her heart is stilled by a man who knows her through and through, and loves her even so!

Her restlessness is stilled in the deep, deep pool of acceptance. Jesus' acceptance stills her restless heart, and she discovers her own self-acceptance in the glory of another's acceptance of her, every bit of her! She can at last love herself, fill the ache in her own heart, because she knows she is loveable.

She does not need to cross theological swords, show off her biting intellect, flit from one unsatisfactory relationship to another, because at last, she realizes she is enough.

Good enough, smart enough, lovely enough, for God.

Do you ever hear that message?

Or do you, as I often do, hear it through a filter of worry that there is something you really have to do to earn that love?

A filter that says you have to be better, or work harder, or hide some part of yourself? A filter that says you are unworthy, unlovable, despised? Not good enough for God to want you, love you; not yet?

What happened at Sychar?

What happened to that woman?

It is a long time ago now...almost 2,000 years that she met that man.

But maybe, just maybe, Jesus helped her learn the one thing that can still our restlessness:

We are acceptable.

We are worthy.

We are cherished.

As we are...with our wounds, our faults, our failures dragging along with us, still:

We are acceptable.

We are worthy.

We are cherished.

And then we are free from hating, and judging and scorning and hurting. Because we are loved, we can love. Because we are accepted, we can accept others. Because we are free, we set others free.

Then, indeed, we will feel reborn, and alive in the world as the kingdom of God's glory, and we will see how the world is ripe for a harvest of joy and peace, at last!