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Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Good and Faithful Bridegroom”

Text: John 4:5-30, 39-42; Romans 5:1-8; Exodus 17:1-7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wonder what this woman’s story was?

Oh, we heard some of it. She had been married five times, and the man she now had, she was now with, was not her husband.

How quickly, I think, we gloss over that fact. In our day and age, we’re used to it. Divorce and remarriage are the norm now. Living together outside of marriage is expected now; is prudent, even, we’re told. There are apps for your phone to help you cheat on your spouse. This is all the “new normal.”

But think of what this “new normal” has done. Pre-nuptual agreements just in case your “I do” becomes “I don’t.” Children growing up without a father or mother, or caught in a tug-o-war between their father and mother. Poverty often results when a two-income household suddenly becomes a one-income household. There is hurt and pain when spouses who were one flesh are ripped apart, and families destroyed. This is bad enough when it happens here or there, but when whole communities are affected, now its schools and neighborhoods in decline, and it becomes a self-perpetuating downward spiral.

That’s our situation, but it wasn’t yet like that in Samaria, in Jesus’ day. So this woman was marked, she was notorious. For you don’t come to draw water, which is quite heavy, at the sixth hour, high noon, in the heat of the day, unless you have to. So not only had she been used and abused by men, but was scorned and shunned by the women as well.

I wonder what her story was? What had happened with those five previous men? They could have all died and so her many remarriages legitimate, but that’s unlikely. And even if they had, imagine the emotional toll that would have taken on her. But she wouldn’t have been shunned for that. More likely, then, is that she had endured multiple divorces. And so for whatever reasons, five times she was told to go away. Five times she was told she was not good enough. Five times she was rejected. And now this sixth man didn’t even bother with marriage. And she endured it. The pain, the shame, the uncertainty and insecurity.

And that was all in addition to being a Samaritan and being treated by the Jews - who lived both to the north of you in Galilee, and to the south of you in Judea - that you weren't any better than a dog. In fact, so filthy were you that the Jews would rather travel additional miles *around* your country than go *through* your country.

That's her story, or some of it, at least. Maybe you can relate. To being rejected, being told you're not good enough, being used and abused, or scorned and shunned. I suspect there's some of that - that uncertainty and insecurity - in all of us. Though we try to hide it. We don't want anyone to know. We come to church, dress nice, put a smile on, and try to look like we have it altogether . . . because what if they knew? What if they knew how bad, how hurting, how much guilt and shame I have? I don't want them to know. I don't want anyone to know. Because if they did . . . *if they did* . . .

So imagine what must have felt like a knife plunging into the gut of this woman when Jesus says to her, ***Go, call your husband, and come here.*** She tells Him the truth - ***I have no husband*** - but it's not the whole truth. She's just like us. She doesn't want anyone to know. But Jesus does. Knows her whole past, in fact. And what's going through her mind? Here we go again. More pain, more hurt, more rejection. This chance encounter, though unusual, for Jews usually weren't in those parts and if they were wouldn't start up conversations with Samaritans. This chance encounter, which had started out so nicely, so unexpectedly normal, in this woman's life where there was very little normal . . . was now just more of the same. *Why did He have to say that?*

So okay, Mr. Prophet - because He must be a prophet to know all about her like this - okay Mr. Prophet, what am I supposed to do now? Did you just come up here to shame me? Tell me, what am I supposed to do. ***You [Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.*** Meaning: Jerusalem is the place of forgiveness, because that's what worship is, that's why we come - to receive forgiveness. You Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where I have to worship, but I can't! You don't want me in your country, and you won't let me in your Temple. So what am I supposed to do, huh? You tell me. You know my sin, you point out my sin, you dredge up my sin, why? Did you come just to toy with me and my shame? I got enough of that already! So what am I supposed to do? And I imagine you could see the tears welling up in her eyes. It's almost too much.

This is exactly what the Law does, or is supposed to do - bring us to the point of hopelessness. Bring us to say to Jesus: *What do you want me to do?* I'm a dirty, rotten sinner and there's nothing I can do about it! You know it, I know it, maybe I can hide it from others, but . . . *this stinks!* The world stinks, I stink, the hurts and pains stink, the shame stinks, people are judgmental, and the harder I try the worse it all seems to get! So what do you want me to do, God? What do you want me to do?

And if there are tears welling up in your eyes, good.

Up to this point, the woman was **intrigued** by Jesus and His talk of living water, which she didn't understand, but it sure sounded good! Then she was **convicted** by Jesus who knew all her sin and shame and filth. Now she can be **saved** by Jesus because she has nowhere else to go. She can't hide, she can't explain, she can't pretend. It's all out there. Now what? She needs a Saviour. She needs a Messiah, a Christ. The Jews wouldn't do it, she couldn't do it, the men she had and the man she now has can't do it . . . there's only one who can. There's only one hope to which she clings, *and it's a small one* for someone like her and in her predicament. And **Jesus says to her, "I who speak to you am he."** What you need, I'm the one who's going to do it.

And this woman, who just a moment before felt so hopeless, must now have felt like she just won the lottery! Are you kidding me? Here? Now? Me? The Messiah? But who else could it be? Who else would treat her like a normal person? And . . . could she say it or think it, because it had been so long . . . someone who would, could, actually *love her* again?

We don't have a well, but we have a Font. We don't have a well, but we have a Pulpit. We don't have a well, but we have an Altar. Where Jesus comes **for you**. Where Jesus comes and says: I know who you are. I know all you have done and how much you mess up. But now says: *You are my beloved child* in Holy Baptism. Who says: *I forgive you all your sins* in Holy Absolution. Who says: *This is My Body, This is My Blood* in the Holy Supper. Who says: **I who speak to you am he** - your Saviour, the promised one. Who came not just to speak to you, but to back up those words with actions - to go to the cross and die for you. Nobody would have died for this Samaritan woman - in fact, they all wished she was dead! They didn't want her around or have to deal with her. But Jesus? This is how Paul put it, as we heard in the Epistle:

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, - still sinners - Christ died for us.

And you know why? Because that's what bridegrooms do for their brides, what husbands do for their wives - or, at least, are supposed to. Paul said that in Ephesians. So Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, does that for His Bride, the Church - lays down His life. Not because of who we are - we're filthy, stinking, and unclean. But because of who He is - the lover of mankind.

So this episode takes place at Jacob's well. Because Jacob's father Isaac, his wife was found *at a well*. And Jacob first met his wife Rachel *at a well*. And Jesus takes us to be His own not at a well, but at the Font, where there is **living water** - water which is alive because of His Word and Spirit. So that forgiven and loved by Him, we **never be thirsty forever**. Never thirsting for life in this world of death. Never thirsting for love in this

world of sin and hate. Never thirsting for hope is this world that is circling the drain. Because Jesus has spoken to us and is still speaking to us words of forgiveness, life, and hope.

So here is our ***living water*** in the wilderness of this world because here is the Rock, Jesus, who pours out this water for us. His hands and feet were pierced with nails and His side struck with a spear so that His water and blood wash and refresh us always. That His forgiveness and salvation be always here for us. And they are. It may have been a chance encounter for that Samaritan woman at the well that day (or not!), but here, there is nothing left to chance. Here is the sure and certain Word of God and all his promises for you. For all of us who see in this Samaritan woman a picture of ourselves.

And who, then, like this Samaritan woman, leave this place and tell others: *Come and see. Come and hear.* Because you're going to hear something amazing! You're going to hear something you're not going to hear in other places! You're going to hear the truth - how wretched you are, how sinful you are, how unworthy you are. But then this, too: how much Jesus has done for you and has for you, here. Come and see. Come and hear. Come and be washed. Come, take and eat. But come! Because when this Samaritan woman did, she found what she had been so longing for: that bridegroom who would not let her down, would not let her go, and would love her to the end.

So who are you? What have you done? What do you need? Come. He's here for you, too.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.