

3rd Sunday of Lent

Scrutiny Testimony
by
St. Julie Billiart Parishioner

Janet Ferree



The Woman at the Well

Imagine having no friends, no one to gather with for casual conversation. Imagine being considered undesirable for people to have in their midst, forcing you to leave your house only when others aren't around. You are a person who has to lurk in the shadows and must enter the light of day only at the harshest and most desolate times; someone who has a history so contemptible that no one wants you around. You have no face, no voice--no existence--feeling lonely, guilty, unlovable, or even angry.

The woman in today's gospel is just such a person. Little is mentioned about her situation except that she had many husbands and currently lives with a man to whom she isn't married. Society has labeled her an outcast. We don't know why she had so many husbands. Did they die? Throw her out? What other secrets does

she hold? Had she been born into poverty, forced to support herself with the only thing of “value” she possessed: her body?



Then along comes Jesus, who “breaks the rules” and speaks to her. He asks her for water. Though somewhat surprised, the woman doesn’t hesitate to question him about why he speaks to her. It is at this point her entire *being* is transformed. She has learned first-hand of the water that *quells all thirst*, the water that *wells-up to eternal life*. She also discovered Jesus knows all about her—all her secrets are now exposed by this stranger. Yet he remains with her, talks to her. He trusts her with the revelation that he is the Messiah. And her spirit is freed. She believes.

So what actually happened in this story and how can that relate to you and I 2000 years later? Emotionally unburdened of her previous transgressions, she is given the strength and confidence to go to town

in the middle of the day and talk to people about what happened. She is transformed by her encounter with a stranger that knew everything about her—things no one else knew or she wouldn't have been so surprised.

Jesus obviously didn't feel the need to shun her. He didn't think her status in life precluded her from delivering the message of his identity to those who cast her away in the first place. It would seem that no one is too unworthy to carry out the will of God.

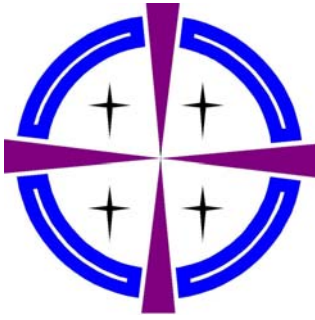
Who else might be considered a Woman at the Well? Who do we see today that might not be considered desirable or worthy to be included in our lives? Where do we see the face of a human being standing apart from the world? On a starving child that no one will feed? On an elderly man no one will talk to? On the teenager next door, hiding himself in internet chat rooms where he is anonymous and therefore accepted? How about on the face of your brother-in-law dying of AIDS and in the eyes of a woman struggling to be heard above the din of gender discrimination and oppression? Can we find one in our own families, in our own *mirrors*?



Because society won't recognize people living in the shadows, are they of no use to anybody? What terrible secrets might they harbor, or sins did they commit, to deserve this status? What could a starving toddler living in Darfur possibly have done to warrant her condition and cause her to die in the dust, naked and alone except for the flies drinking her tears, while the world glances from a technologically safe distance?

The Bible is full of stories about the momentum of the Kingdom of God being placed into the hands of those who were considered outcasts and unworthy by the standards of their day. But they rose to the occasion. The woman in today's Gospel takes that drink of Living Water offered her by Jesus and grows into a shining testimony of what the Spirit of love can achieve.

Jesus found value in a forgotten woman and trusted her to carry his Light to others, so what must *we* as townspeople do to accept that Light from her and pass it freely on to all, especially those who cower in the shadows? Surely if the Woman at the Well is fit to be trusted as



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Janet placed before us a challenge. Next time you and I look in the mirror, who will we see, the woman or a townspeople?

In many ways we all can relate to the woman. I dare say every human being at different times in our lives have felt alone, have felt judged, have felt ignored and unloved. We all wait to have someone tell us that we are worth something, that we make a difference in this world. This past week I attended a funeral and in the eulogy a son read a letter he had accidentally found that his mother had written some 10 yrs before her death. In it she stated how much she loved her children and her husband of some 60 yrs. He said that he had to read it at the funeral because some of the family members needed to know how she truly felt, since she was a very private person and didn't always share her feeling.

We all need to know where we fit in within our family, within our work, within our community, within our church. As a woman, I sometimes feel like many other women that the tradition of our church holds us back from entering fully into the ritual and mission of the church. Then there are those who have little

or no voice in our society. They rely on others to bring attention to their plight in life.

What questions arise when we look in the mirror and see staring back at us a townspeople. Do the questions sound like this? Have I isolated myself from living life, from discovering another human being's story, from compassion and caring.

Have I, along with others, created laws and actions that say to strangers "you are not worthy of recognition, let alone love? Do I believe that I can be transformed by God's love?"

In today's gospel, Jesus offers the power of love to the lowest of the low.

To the one who is unafraid to enter into soul searching, unafraid to change her ways, accepting of the invitation to fall into true love with the one who told her everything that she ever did... and believing in the promise of eternal life that only Jesus could offer.

Each and every year we enter into this season of Lent. It is not just a time to deny ourselves certain pleasures, but is meant to be a time to call upon our God to remove all that keeps us from falling in love with Jesus who over and over tells us who we really are; people created in the image and likeness of God.

That we are people who have the God given power to change our lives by looking honestly at our prejudices and judgment of others, by digging even deeper to recognize that we continue to detach ourselves from our brothers and sisters when we say; "THEY need to do this and this before their welcomed at this TABLE, those people drive too nice of a car to be asking for food, they dress really strangely we should keep an eye on them, why should we care about THEM when they don't care about themselves, we don't have to feed the whole world do we?

It is time to be unafraid of true soul searching, for we have nothing to fear. Christ offers us the same love and forgiveness, the same transformation that was given not only to the woman at the well, but also to the townspeople. It's our call! We can either accept the gift of faith, tell others about the gift of eternal life or we can continue to live in darkness.

Lent is a time of preparation and purification, which is not just a time to deny ourselves certain pleasures, but is meant to be a time of intense preparation and purification as we journey with people who are accepting God's call to enter into the waters of new birth.

Confident in God's love and mercy, we ask God for the strength to withstand evil and remain free from sin.

Let us enter into a powerful prayer that reminds us of our need for the healing, conversion and reconciliation.

Together let us kneel before our God confident that God will deliver us from present evils and restore us to a life of grace.

We invite everyone to place their hand on the shoulder of the person next to you as we pray...

God of all humanity:

Drive out all racial and ethnic conflict, the power of violence and fear, oppression and vengeance, greed and war. We pray....

SUNG REFRAIN:

God of Truth:

Free us, your church, from the sins of false pride, judgment, placing barriers before those who wish to come to your Table and for those who wish to serve more fully at your Table. We pray...

God of Spirit and Transformation:

Wash clean the hearts of people from racism, nationalism, homophobia, consumerism, hatred and ignorance. We pray.....

God of healing and compassion:

Repair the pain and hurt that is caused by envy, jealousy, self-indulgence and lack of patience. We pray.....

God of the sick and those who have died:

Please say aloud the names of those who are sick...Alexandra Osuegra

Please say aloud the names of those who have died...we pray especially for Olga Denardo, Ann hanf, K.E. George, Clare MacMillian, Laura Rosenberger, Mike Gallagher, baby Osuegra...

Bring comfort to those who are sick and grant peace to those who have died.

Let us pray for the elect.

All-merciful Father, through your son you revealed your mercy to the woman of Samaria; and moved by that same care you have offered salvation to all sinners.

Look favorably on these elect, who desire to become your adopted children through the power of your sacraments.

Free them from the slavery of sin, and for Satan's crushing yoke exchange the gentle yoke of Jesus.

Protect them in every danger, that they may serve you faithfully in peace and joy and render you thanks for ever. Amen.