

Sermon on 3 Lent A, John 4, verses 4-30 and 39-42, 2-24-2008

Preached at San Pablo Lutheran Church, Bogotá, Colombia by Pr. David Van Kley

*La mujer en el pozo.* A woman and Jesus meet at Jacob's well, in Sychar, a village of Samaria.

Community wells were gathering places at that time, places where people came together to draw water for their families, but also to talk about anything and everything—their children, the weather, their world. I brought along a picture of such a well in a village in Nicaragua. There are three girls and a boy standing in front of the well with a container for carrying water. In the background you can see the well, along with several other people who've come to draw water.

**This** well, in Sychar, was such a gathering place. I'm sure you have gathering places in Bogotá, too, not wells, but restaurants, parks, this church. In fact, I saw a picture in our local newspaper last week of thousands who'd come together at one such gathering place, *El Cuadrado de Simon Bolivar*.

Now, an unusual thing about the scene at the well in Sychar was the time: **noon, mediodia**. During the heat of the day, no one came to draw water. People came in the cool of the morning and in the evening, after the heat of the day had passed. Normally, during the middle of the day, the well was deserted. It was strange to see two people there at noon.

But there was something even stranger: the **identity** of the two. The man sitting by the well, exhausted from a long journey, helpless to quench his thirst without a bucket, was a **Jew**. Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. They were like cats and dogs or like Argentines and Venezuelans at a soccer game, except worse. Maybe more like members of FARC and the paramilitaries! Jewish people traveling to Galilee normally crossed the Jordan, going miles out of their way to avoid Samaria. The rabbis said, "It is better to eat the flesh of **swine** than to eat the bread of a **Samaritan**." The fact that Jesus was there was amazing! It would be like someone from an upscale neighborhood near *Monserate* showing up in the neighborhood of San Pablo and hanging out here, at night. Anyone could see that Jesus was out of place. .

The person Jesus spoke with was a **woman**. This, too, was remarkable. In those days, the roles of men and women were set in concrete. A man simply would not talk to a woman he did not know on the street—it was socially and religiously forbidden! Add to that the fact that **this** woman was alone at the well, at noon, apparently cut off from the society of women, perhaps because they knew what Jesus later drew out of her, that she "had five husbands and the one she (was living with) was not her husband." I mean, either she was incredibly unlucky or had awfully poor taste in men! In any case, she avoided the rest of the women. *Jesus y la mujer en el pozo en mediodia*—a strange sight, to say the least!

They talk. Their conversation is like a well: it starts out shallow and goes deeper

and deeper until it hits the water. The woman and the man from totally different worlds come to know **each other!** At first, the woman thinks merely that Jesus is an oddball. But as the conversation drives deeper, she recognizes him as a prophet. She hears him say that it doesn't matter where people worship God, that Sychar is as good as Jerusalem or Custer is as good as Bogotá, that what really matters is not the place but that you worship God with honesty, in a spirit of reverence. She says, it will be like that when Messiah comes. And then Jesus says, "I **am** he," using the very language that God used when speaking to Moses from the burning bush. **I AM! I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE! I am** the same one who said "let there be light and there was light." **I am** the one who led Israel through the waters of the Red Sea.

At the same time, the woman reveals much about **herself**: her thoughts about faith and religion, her deep thirst for something more in life. Even that which she tries **not** to reveal is drawn out of her, that she had been married several times and now was living with someone to whom she wasn't married. Jesus knows her through and through. Yet, he doesn't walk away. He doesn't condemn her. Knowing everything, he accepts her, which is a form of love. That was exactly what she needed, too, to be known **and** accepted. Perhaps that **was** the living water. She then leaves her water jar unfilled and runs away, **herself** become a well, bubbling over: "You wouldn't believe this person I met! He just might be the Messiah! Come and see for yourself!"

What an incredible gift—to be known and accepted by another! Though you are different from them, though you may not feel worthy of them, though you don't feel as if you belong to them. We in the US and in Colombia live in a world of powerful corporations that couldn't care less about the people they use to make money: Dole and Exxon and Folgers. We live under governments that don't know who we are and don't necessarily care to know, the governments of President Uribe and President Bush. We have some things in common and yet, we come from different worlds, you and me.

God knows that. God knows **us**. And in Christ, God accepts us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

I brought along a picture from the last time I was with you: a picture of me with the kids of San Pablo. It hangs on the wall in my office. Every time, I look at it I remember the kids with their gifts and songs. ***El hombre viejo con la barba blanca y los niños y niñas hermosos de Bogotá!*** What a gift, to be known and accepted by people different than you! What a gift to know and accept people different than you! What a gift to be in relationship with each other, because of the Christ we have in common. This is what it means to be companions. And then, to go out from here like ***la mujer en el pozo*** and tell everyone what Jesus has made possible.

Ours is a God of forgiveness. Ours is a God of peace. Ours is a God of justice. Ours is a God who lifts up the poor and humbles the powerful. Ours is a God of truth.

Ours is a God of hope. Ours is a God of life. But it all begins with this: ours is a God of relationship. And we from *Iglesia Luterana Dakota del Sur* thank God that we are in relationship with you, *hermanas y hermanos de nuestro*.

Amen.