

While We Were Yet Sinners

by Linda Rex

March 12, 2023, 3rd Sunday in Preparation for Easter or Lent—One of the things I think we overlook when reading the gospel stories is Jesus' intentionality with regards to building relationships with people in a variety of circumstances. One example is the woman he met at a well in Samaria, the story we read about in John 4:5–42.

In normal circumstances, the two of them would not have had any conversation at all, had they conformed to the cultural standards of the day. Back then, a good rabbi would never be seen in public talking with a woman, and most certainly not if she was a Samaritan. These two peoples, the ancient Jews and Samaritans, were passionate about the historical, religious, and cultural rifts which stood between them, and this divide was large enough that this simple conversation would never have happened if Jesus hadn't been led by the Spirit to obey his Father's command to seek this woman out and speak to her.

The assumption of many of the ancient Jews was that these Samaritans were the worst of sinners, apostates, in fact. There was no room for them in God's kingdom, they believed, so they were dismissed and rejected, forbidden to enter the temple in Jerusalem and worship with the Jews. Jesus, though, goes out of his way to stop at this well and invite this Samaritan woman into a conversation. He offers her a relationship with God which is centered in himself rather than in a particular mountain or temple. He offers her grace—inviting her into a grace place where she can live reconciled with and in right relationship with God.

Relationships can be difficult and painful. The Samaritan woman had been through relationship after relationship, hoping that somehow, she might find the life she was looking for. All she had ever found was more pain, more abuse, and more suffering. How much different would her life have been if she had been drinking from the correct well all along—drinking from the living water of life in relationship with the Father through Christ in the Spirit? How would it have been different if the people in her life had been offering her a space of grace instead of condemnation, rejection, and humiliation?

The good news is that this woman drank from the well of living water Jesus offered her. She believed Jesus when he told her he was the Messiah, the Christ. And then she went and told many others this good news, inviting them into this grace space as well.

The apostle Paul, in the New Testament passage for this Sunday, Romans 5:1–11, talks about this incredible gift of grace God offers every one of us. He tells us that even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus demonstrated the love of God in a tangible way, by reconciling us to God even when we had made ourselves enemies of God. Paul was reminding his readers that they needed to offer one another the same grace God offers each of us in Christ. Are we willing to lay our own life down as Jesus did his by inviting another person into the grace space we have come to dwell in by faith?

Father, thank you for loving us so much that you did not allow us to be estranged from you forever, but sent your Son to bring us all home again. By your Spirit, grant us the grace to turn to Jesus in faith, trusting in your abundant love, which you have shed abroad in our hearts. And move us to invite others into this grace space you've created for us all, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our

tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Romans 5:1–11 NASB