

015 Third Sunday of Lent (A)

A Chance Meeting

Today's Gospel tells the wonderful story of a chance meeting between Jesus and a Samaritan woman – a meeting that changes her forever. It offers the hope that we too can encounter Jesus in a chance meeting, and never be the same again, as long as our hearts are open to such a meeting: 'If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.'

The setting for Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman is Jacob's well in Samaria. It is the middle of the day and very hot. Jesus comes to the well and sits down beside it. He is hot and tired and dirty, probably quite smelly! And thirsty! A wonderful expression of his humanity. Yet this is the Son of God! His disciples have gone into the town to buy food and he is left alone at the well. Very dangerous! You can never trust Jesus to observe the conventions when he is alone!

A Samaritan woman comes to draw water. Why has she come in the middle of the day – the hottest time. No-one goes to get water at that time. Surely the women of the town go early in the morning or perhaps in the evening when it is cooler. There they meet and chat with each other. The well is a place of social gathering. This woman goes at midday when there is no one there because she is a shunned woman – a sinner. She is not welcome at the well when 'decent' judgmental people are there.

At the well she meets Jesus who begins to talk to her – breaking all the conventions. Normally Jews don't speak to Samaritans and men don't speak to women they don't know. He asks her to give him some water. He doesn't shun her though he knows her background, but treats her with great dignity and respect. He assures her that God is offering her the waters of eternal life also, that she is precious to God.

During her encounter with Jesus, the woman is transformed. Her whole sense of herself changes. She no longer sees herself as someone to be used by others but a person of value with a message for others. She hurries back to the town and talks to all the people who had previously shunned her. She tells them about Jesus.

Seeing the transformation that has happened her, the people of her town go out to see Jesus and he touches them also and they invite him to come back and stay with them. They too are changed. They talk to a Jew (Jesus) and they talk to the woman whom they had shunned for so long.

We too will meet the Lord in the course of this coming week. He will enter our lives at unexpected times, in unexpected ways, through unexpected people. Our lives are very different to the Samaritan woman, but as the Lord came to her in the actual circumstances of her life, so he will come to us also in the actual circumstances of our life. His message may be a little different, but he will ask us to do something for him – to give him a drink of water, or something else – and he will offer us the waters of eternal life. On that day, may we listen to his voice, talk with him, and allow him to transform us and our world view, as he did for the Samaritan woman.

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