

John 4: 25-39 “Ripe For the Harvest” Rev. Janet Chapman 3/26/23

There are some folks who have been put off by the biblical story we have been sitting with for the past few weeks during Lent, because it is so long and convoluted. The meaning can get easily lost or confused in all the dialogue, not to mention the woman’s inability to catch on to Jesus’ innuendos and irony, which is actually characteristic of most in this Gospel. Honestly, like Alyce McKenzie notes, if I wanted to listen in on a complicated, convoluted conversation with Jesus, I could just record my own prayer life. Seriously though, it is common words in this text like noon-time, well, food and water, thirst and hunger, bucket, husbands, worship, mountain, ancestors, spirit and truth, and harvest, these words all end up pointing to a deeper meaning which will take a lifetime to unpack. Such metaphorical speech can make a common conversation between two people quite puzzling. Take the two old women who were sitting on the front porch one evening. One was listening to the crickets chirping. The other was listening to a choir rehearsing in the church across the street. The latter said to the former, “Isn’t that heavenly music?” “Yes,” said the first woman, “And I understand they do it by rubbing their legs together!”

As we draw to a close on this intimate conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, what happens next is nothing short of extraordinary. To this woman, Jesus reveals his true identity. She has shared her truth, she doesn’t have a husband, and now Jesus shares his as he says, “I Am.” This is what true relationship looks like and Jesus desires we all have that with God. David Mace once said that strong relationships are not built on common interests or perspectives in life, they are built on self-revelation. I think he is right as this past summer I spent 3 weeks with my seminary roommate whom I hadn’t seen in 30 years. We talked about

all that had happened to us in the intervening years and she told me some things she had done that even she didn't understand. I said to her, "You know, I think I understand. I get you." She responded, "I believe you do, and I get you as well." This is the stuff that makes for enduring relationships. In what we heard Deanna read earlier, it indicates Jesus revealed to the woman, "I am he." However, the truth is that the word "he" is not found in the original Greek. In fact, some Bibles put a superscript letter next to the word "he" and then explain in the endnote, "Not in the Greek text." Unfortunately, by adding the word "he," translators have made it easier for us to miss the impact of Jesus' surprising and startling statement. Jesus clearly and directly reveals to the woman, "I Am." That may ring a bell to some of you because that is God's response to Moses at the burning bush when Moses asks God's name. God says to Moses, "I am who I am." Then God goes on to say, "Thus you shall say to the Israelities, 'I am has sent me'... (for) this is my name forever and this my title for all generations." It is definitely a "mic-drop" moment then, and now. This is the first "I am" statement in John's Gospel and ironically, the last one will come in chapter 18 which causes 600 Roman soldiers to fall to the ground. Jesus is the Divine Word made flesh, the begotten God who now once again dwells with God's people. By responding to the woman with those 2 simple but decisive words, "I am," Jesus is connecting all the other "I am" statements found in John. The author wants us to understand that Jesus is this woman's bread of life, her living water, her gate for safety, her Good Shepherd, her resurrection and life, her way and truth and life, and her vine – the vine to which she now clings, to whom she belongs.

(Booyah! Mic-drop!) Except they didn't have microphones back then so better yet, she drops her water jar. Why does John deem it important to tell us she drops her water jar,

leaving it behind? Some think she was planning to return and get it later, others argue she was so excited, she just forgot it. Either may be valid, but neither is very compelling. If we remember the call of the disciples, they left fishing boats and tax offices to follow Jesus; why wouldn't it make sense that the woman who fetches water, as part of her existence and survival, leaves her water jug to enter into a life-changing relationship with this one who is "I am"? Karoline Lewis says maybe there is even more to it than that – could the water jug signify those things that have held her back, kept her ostracized from the community? Could it symbolize her shame, her rejection, her loneliness, her guilt? Maybe she drops the water jar as she loses the identity the world has placed on her because now, she has found a new identity? Not "five-time-loser" but disciple and witness to the good news; not one to pity, but one to trust; not the "barren one," but now the reborn one?