***“Gushing Up”*** by S. Finlan, for The First Church, March 15, 2020

**John 4:5–26**

5So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink” . . . 9The woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” 10Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked, and he would have given you living water.” 11The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well. . . ?” 13Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” 15The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty. . .”

16 Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” 17The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; 18 the one you have now is not your husband.” 19The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” 21Jesus said, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . 23The hour is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25The woman said to him, “I know that when Messiah (who is called Christ) comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” 26Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

This woman is ready to engage Jesus in conversation on just about any topic from Jacob, to worship, to probing what Jesus means by “living water.” Jesus is ready and willing to talk to her, but he guides her in a spiritual direction.

The woman’s interest is deeper than she realizes. She is not just looking for physical water, and or for a mild flirtation with a friendly Jewish man. She is looking for something spiritual, as shown by the way she responds. Jesus meets her where she is, while trying to lift her attention to eternal realities. Maybe Jesus encounters all of us this way, in our daily lives, and offers to draw our gaze to spiritual things.

He tells the woman about living water. But she dodges the issue, quibbling about how he might draw up the water without a bucket, then teasing him about whether he thinks he is greater than Jacob. Jesus says that he is talking about never thirsting again: “The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (4:14). He is not only promising eternal life, but stressing that its power and energy are available *now*. The waters of eternal life can gush up in our *present* life. And it is free for the asking.

The woman she says okay, “give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.” And this is when Jesus says something that grabs her full attention. He asks her to go get her husband, knowing that she will be stunned when he says that the guy she is with is not her husband. Jesus is a master psychologist. He knows he’s got her full attention now, but she tries to dodge him again, raising the issue about whether one should worship God in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, as the Samaritans do. She is diverting to a side issue of religious politics, a debate about whether Judaea or Samaria is primary.

Don’t we sometimes do the same thing as the woman is doing, dodging a spiritual issue by chattering about some current topic? Don’t we use small talk to evade the *bigger* thing that Jesus wants to talk about? Small talk is safe. It’s a distraction.

But Jesus goes to the Big Thing. In fact, he delivers one of his most important teachings: “True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. . . God is Spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth” (4:23–24). This is a message he has not even given to the apostles. And yet he delivers it to this stranger, a foreigner, and a woman, at that.

So he shocks the apostles as well as shocking this woman. As I say, he is a master at getting people to pay attention. He wants them all to be keyed up and ready to really *hear* the spiritual message. He has to shock them out of the safe place of small talk. In the case of the apostles, he has to shock them out of thinking they are so special that they will always get the news first.

Worshiping in spirit and in truth care about materialistic details like location; it means genuine spiritual worship not tainted with selfishness or national pride, or trying to impress God with our supposed holiness. God is not material in any way. God is Spirit. But we are spirit, too, at least to a tiny degree. Reach out to God with all your spirit, all your mind, and all your strength, and you cannot fail to make the connection.

But this is not just an abstract teaching. It is a message to a particular person. And he tells her that he is the Messiah—*also* something he has not directly told the apostles. He seems to have chosen her to be a messenger.

She believes him wholly. Her whole life is changed by this momentary encounter with Jesus. She runs into town and proclaims the Messiah’s presence to the whole town. Really, she becomes the first Samaritan evangelist. The Samaritans hear the message from one of their own.

This is a very human story with an important teaching wrapped up in it, the idea that God is Spirit and expects genuinely spiritual worship. But it is also a human story with lots of emotion. Do we appreciate how the character and the experience of this woman become part of the message? The curiosity and the honesty of this Samaritan woman, and her reactions to Jesus, are part of the story of the spread of the message about the God who is Spirit, and who is above any nationalistic competition between Judaea and Samaria.

Jesus is happy to announce to all peoples and nationalities that God is Spirit, and welcomes all of them into the universal family. Whosoever *will*, may come.