

Monday, September 17 – Read John 4:1-6. Hatred and distrust between Israelites and Samaritans went back over 500 years, to Israel’s return from exile in Babylon (cf. Ezra 4:1-5). Jesus’ fellow Jews saw Samaritans the way many Israelis today see Palestinians, and vice versa. But Jesus saw Samaritans as people who needed his love as much as anyone else, and treated them that way. He went through Samaria on purpose, and reached Jacob's well at noon. John said Jesus “had to go” through Samaria. Pastor Roger Frederickson wrote, “He did not need to save the three days He could gain by passing through this ill-regarded province rather than crossing the river and going up the eastern desert route.... the Father had sent Him into the whole world—not just part of it.” Does God’s love ever call you to go to places that human divisions tell you to avoid? How can you break down barriers between you and other people in your day-to-day life?

Tuesday, September 18 – Read John 4:7-10. John gave non-Palestinian readers the key background to understand why this conversation was remarkable— “Jews and Samaritans didn’t associate with each other” (verse 9). “According to Jewish tradition, a Samaritan woman was continually unclean; it was therefore impure to drink from her vessel.” But Jesus initiated contact, asking simply, “Give me some water to drink” (verse 7). British author Malcolm Muggeridge wrote that he had achieved some fame, success, pleasure and fulfillment. He went on, “I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing...measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty.” In what ways has Jesus quenched your inner thirst(s)? In what areas of life are you still thirsty? Rabbi Eliezer, who lived not long after Jesus’ day, wrote, “He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine.” Yet in addition to Jesus asking the woman for a drink, his disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food (verse 8). How can asking another person for help of some kind break down barriers that may separate you from them? Are you willing to ask for help when you need it?

Wednesday, September 19 – Read John 4:11-15. Jesus’ offer of “living water” (in common speech, that meant the freshest, cleanest running water, not stagnant water that had stood in a cistern or well) was intriguing. But the woman at first showed skepticism: “Where would you get this living water?” (verse 11) That didn’t discourage Jesus. He described the spiritual water he offered in such appealing terms that the woman’s thirsty soul responded, “Give me this water!” (verse 15). Jesus said, “The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life” (verse 14). What choices have helped you make your walk with Jesus one that “bubbles up into eternal life”? In what ways are you able to let that joyous, bubbling quality show as you go about your day-to-day life? Pastor Bruce Milne noted the natural humanness Jesus showed toward this woman: “Jesus is clearly ‘at ease’ with her, which frees her to confront her deepest needs.” Who are the people who, because of beliefs or lifestyle, make you uneasy? How can Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well help you find ways to relate more naturally and comfortably to them?

Thursday, September 20 – Read John 4:16-24. Shame probably led the woman to come to the well alone. Jesus frankly stated the facts of her life, though we sometimes forget her context. Healthcare was limited then—some of her husbands may have died. And women could not initiate divorce, so men, not she, would have ended her marriages. She at first tried to shift the subject by raising a Jewish/Samaritan religious debate (verses 19-20). Jesus refused the bait. He said the key to worshipping God was not finding the “right” place, but worshiping “in spirit and truth.” In verse 21, Jesus told the woman “The time is coming” when you will not worship either in Samaria or Jerusalem. He repeated the phrase in verse 23, and then, as though catching himself, said, “—and is here!” One paradox in Christian faith is that “in God’s eternity, the battle has been won, the battle is raging still, and the battle will be won.” How do you understand and value Jesus’ words: “the time...is here”? What feelings does it trigger in you to need to keep waiting in faith for the full arrival of God’s Kingdom in all its glory?

Friday, September 21 – Read John 4:25-30, 20:17-18. The Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well became his first preacher. This story found its echo 16 chapters later when Mary Magdalene became the first witness to the risen Messiah, and in turn became the first preacher of this new miracle. John called his past and present audience to listen to women’s voices. Jesus did not ignore or devalue any voices. He recognized women (and others who were routinely silenced) as being powerful conduits for His miraculous message. In Isaiah 42:14, the prophet used an image of God as a woman in labor. God promised to gasp, pant, and deliver his children from exile. That image, and Jesus later making the woman at the well and Mary Magdalene the first ministers, showed that God identified with women and invited women to identify with God’s amazing story. What images of God particularly compel you? Do you most often think of God as a shepherd or a king? How would it deepen and enrich your faith if you focused on Isaiah’s image of God as a woman in labor?