

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 3A
March 12, 2023
John 4:5-26 (27-30, 39-42)

Meeting Jesus

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." (John 4:16-18 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Your family knows you better than anyone else does. And that's true for your biological (or adoptive) family, (and especially your spouse), your church family, or your community family (if that's where you grew up or have lived for a long time). They know your strengths and accomplishments. They also know your weaknesses, failings, and shortcomings. Living in such close proximity, there's no hiding, no matter how hard you might try. While this can be a great source of amusement at family reunions and some comfort in difficult moments, it also exposes you to danger and the potential for injury.

If someone, even your family, knows your past, and they get angry with you, they may hold it against you. They may drag the skeletons out of the family closet. Such language quite often uses words such as "always," "never," "every time," and so on. "You always have to get your own way." "You always run away when there's trouble and I need you most." "Every time she brings her kids over, they break something." "My brother was a selfish brat when we were children, and he hasn't changed a bit." "I don't talk to her anymore because she said or did such-and-such years ago and never said she was sorry for it." Your past is always with you.

Consider, then, how dangerous it could be talking to Jesus. Listen again to part of today's Gospel. As you do, give thought to

your family and think about the potential for personal injury that is part of being in a family:

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered Him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet."

Jesus is certainly a prophet, but He is not so much speaking as a prophet in this Gospel. Jesus is speaking more like this woman's closest family member. Jesus is speaking like a brother. When you are with Jesus, as with any other close family member, there is no place for you to hide.

By speaking so intimately and so directly with her, Jesus places this woman into a very troubling spot, an exposed spot that might possibly lead to ridicule or condemnation. Most likely, this woman has been such a spot before. Not many people come to the well during "the sixth hour," that is, the hottest part of the day. It may well be inferred that this woman was trying to avoid people or was shunned by people. After all, they knew her past and her current living arrangements. When you avoid people, you can avoid the past and much of the pain that it brings you in the present.

But you cannot avoid your family, and there sat Jesus beside the well when a woman of Samaria came to draw water. He had asked for a drink, surprising her that a Jew would speak to a woman and a Samaritan. He drew her in, telling her that He would give her "living water" which could quench her spiritual, eternal thirst. But she could only think in earthly terms. She wanted Jesus' living water so she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well to draw water.

That's when Jesus confronts her with her sin. "Go, call your husband, and come here." "I have no husband." "You are right." She doesn't deny it or make excuses. Rather, she immediately changes the subject. She didn't want to talk about that. But, Jesus uses that diversion to bring her ever nearer to Himself. When she said, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he

comes, he will tell us all things,' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he,'" He had her right where He wanted her.

Last week you heard Jesus explain to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit... You must be born again" (John 3:3, 5-7). Stated another way, Baptism is your birth into God's family, the family of the Spirit. "That which is born of Spirit is spirit."

If last week's Gospel showed you how you become part of God's family, this week's Gospel shows you the kind of family you get when you are baptized. You get Jesus as your older brother, and Jesus knows absolutely everything about you, even those things you would much rather have everyone, including yourself, forget. But, unlike the closeness of our earthly families, which exposes both you and your loved ones to certain dangers, there is no danger at all when you are part of Jesus' family.

Jesus gives you something that you will likely find yourself hard pressed to find even in the finest of families: Jesus gives you complete honesty without condemnation. Jesus gives you total acceptance without reservation, yet without approving your sin or ignoring it. Jesus, fully knowing your past, and present, holds none of it against you, though He does want you to repent and turn from your sin. There is no angry sneer when brother Jesus speaks to this woman; there is only acceptance and welcome. There is no club that Jesus swings in anger and there isn't any "I know too much about you." There is just Jesus and the living water He brings to this woman — Jesus and the living water He brings to you.

Jesus most certainly exposes this woman's sin and guilt and past regrets. Exposure is inevitable when you are with your family. Nobody knows you better than they do. But Jesus exposes in order to bring to repentance and to forgive. Jesus points to this woman's checkered past (and present) in order to wash her, refresh her with the living water of His eternal life. Jesus' Words to this woman, "I who speak to you am He," are nothing short of forgiveness and life.

"Go, call your husband, and come here." "I have no husband."
"You are right."

These Words speak to the ongoing blessing of your Baptism. Whenever you feel the weight of your sins, think of your big Brother, Jesus, sitting by the well of your eternal life, not excusing, but forgiving you all your sins. Whenever you find yourself exposed on account of your past, think of today's Gospel. Jesus knows all about your past and He refuses to hold any of it against you. Whenever you feel withered by regret, think of the living water of your Baptism, and rejoice in the refreshment He has poured out for you there. After all, Jesus took all your sin upon Himself and suffered death for it, for you. He takes your shame upon Himself and draws you to turn from your sin and drink from the eternal fountain of His living water. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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