

3la-2015--notes

1. Some of us here have moved from our country of origin to the United States; but for most of us, it was our ancestors who first came to this country. Such movement required hard adjustments: leaving family & friends, comprehending new languages & customs, and trying to just fit in.

The Israelites were also a traveling people and from today's first reading, we see that they too had a difficult journey

They didn't like the slavery that they left behind in Egypt, but after years of wandering around the desert, they were certainly becoming discouraged

They asked: Where was God in this movement?

We can identify with this people for we too have known similar moments in our own journeys when we feel as though we're meandering through a wasteland

We know what we've left behind, but we're not sure what lies ahead

& so, sometimes we would rather continue old habits and dependencies rather than go through the sacrifice that change requires

2. The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is a familiar one to us

It is high noon, the hottest part of the day. It was an awkward meeting, on so many levels

- 1) Jews and Samaritans were not on speaking terms, anywhere, at any time of day**
- 2) Men and women who did not know each other did not routinely hold casual conversations**
- 3) She was there alone at noon, an unusual time for women to come to the well.**

Usually this work was done in the early and late parts of the day, when the air was cooler, and when the women of the village could visit. But this woman comes alone because she is no longer accepted by the women of the village. She is, after all, the town sinner

Interestingly and importantly, it is a fact that this Samaritan woman receives more attention from John than from anyone else in his gospel

& so I ask: Is a new creation story being told in this seemingly unimportant place?

Just as God created light on the first day, so Jesus leads the woman out of her darkness into light, into a deeper understanding of her identity as well as the identity of Jesus.

We would be wise to let our Lord lead us in life's journey, rather than us attempting to lead him

Simply put, Lent is God's open invitation for us to, once again, follow Jesus, and follow him more deeply. If we so choose, we must let him lead us from our self-centered agendas to his well of salvation

The woman in the story--whose DNA is in all of us--tries to re-frame the conversation to engage Jesus in a debate about religion, worship and politics—in other words, she wasn't immediately willing to look at what was really going on in her life

Not until she relents, gives in to Jesus' loving presence, does she realize that all her words are but empty syllables

3. And so lent urges us to shift to a traveling mode

It invites us to set out; to say to ourselves: I have got to change, I have got to make this journey of mine more worthwhile

We are being invited to leave behind what is not working, what is not food for us and go to a place up ahead where we will be fed to our fullest satisfaction

but how do we respond when failure comes, as surely it will?

When one of life's many experiences bruises, wounds, even crushes us, will we choose to lower our failed lives into the renewing water of God's grace?

Or do we like this woman, simply bounce from experience to experience, plagued by guilt, infected with regret, all the while wondering where we are and where God might be?

Do we dare lower our old, tried but failed lives into God's well of grace by following Jesus through whatever door that is before us?

Some straight talk: do we have the courage to confront the living water that is being offered to us?

4. Is it not possible that the well in this story is a metaphor, a symbol for God's renewing, thirst-quenching grace?

This detailed narrative could be a well of cool, spiritual water with so many opportunities to lower our bucket for a drink

And if we would, we could take a few minutes right now to rest our weary bones on the warm stones of this well, thus finding water that is a grace-filled life in all its God-kissed wonder

What if we lowered our empty, terra cotta vessel of failure into this well of God's grace?

After all the woman in the story did not need Jesus or anyone else to tell her how broken and cracked her life had become

In her rearview mirror were 5 husbands who had used, perhaps abused, and discarded her like so much crumpled paper—recall in those days men divorced women, women couldn't divorce men

Now she lived with a sixth man who was not her husband,—no doubt she was once again being used as a convenient way to satisfy this man's desires

Again, this Samaritan woman's spiritual DNA is in all of us; to be human is to experience no small amount of failure throughout life's journey

We try and fail at all kinds of things: hobbies, learning, relationships, friendships, business ventures, and yes, even in our religious devotions

Failure, like success, is part of the human experience

Even if our family is a wonderfully, pleasant garden, the wilderness is always close by, always encroaching upon our flower beds

Even if we have some success in avoiding the external desert places, there is always the internal wilderness

Have we discovered that no external circumstances, no matter how bleak, are as threatening as the wilderness within?

5. In the deserts of the heart, wrote W. H. Auden, "Let the healing fountain start"

God's healing fountain is not in the Promised Land and that's a good thing because neither are we in the Promised Land

Life is a pilgrimage, an exodus. We live all our days between what was and what we hope will be

**The good news of God's Words is not that all of life can be a garden.
The good news is that God provides His love for us even in the deserts of our lives**

In the most unlikely places, at the most hopeless moments of our lives, God provides us the gift of living water

John's gospel extends the offer from Christ for us to quench our deepest thirst, not from a superficial and temporary source, but from the true Water of Life, Jesus Himself. And so let us drink deeply from the cup of Christ. Splash joyously in his forgiveness and new life.

Because therein lies our hope, our faith; therein lies God's love & this is good news worth passing on

