

It was a beautiful late spring afternoon, and Ole was sitting in the living room, watching a ball game, when Lena entered the room, saying, "Ole, there's trouble with the car. It has water in the carburetor." Ole says, "That's ridiculous. There can't be water in the carburetor." Lena said, "I'm telling you, the car has water in the carburetor." Ole: "You don't even know what a carburetor is. I'll check it out. Where's the car?" Lena: "In the pool."

This morning's scripture passage, while a little long, it is rather well-known. Before we get to it, here are the Haag Notes - rather than the Cliff Notes, to get everyone up to speed on this Lenten road trip.

After the great King Solomon died in 930 BCE, the 120-mile-long kingdom was split into two: the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. 200 years later, Assyrian enemies to the north and east invaded the kingdoms. The southern kingdom stayed much the same as before, but the name was changed to Judea. The northern kingdom was split into two: Galilee in the north and Samaria between Galilee and Judea.

We don't know how many, but some of the Jewish people in Samaria were exiled to other places, and foreigners were brought in to refill the workforce and help tamp down any retaliations from the Jews. As the heart will do what the heart will do, some of the Jewish people intermarried with the foreign transplants, creating generations of integrated families and belief systems that were not 100% Jewish.

The southern, Judean peoples didn't look kindly on the intermingling, considering the mixed-heritage Samaritans to be second-class enemies of the Israelites, who thought themselves to be the pure Jews, as opposed to the Samaritans, who thought themselves to be the pure Jews. Na'er should the twain meet, regardless of the day, time, or occasion.

In the four previous verses of chapter 4, not included in our passage, Jesus had decided to return to Galilee under pressure from the Pharisees. But he was in Judea, 70 - 90 miles to the south - if he went through the 'enemy' territory of Samaria. If he decided to go around Samaria, it would have added 20-30 miles, maybe twice as long time-wise, depending on the terrain and weather.

The dilemma for thousands of people from that time was: 1. take the quick and highly dangerous path through Samaria, or 2. the longer and safer path around Samaria. For whatever reason, had Jesus taken the safer and longer path, we probably wouldn't have today's encounter. We don't know if he chose the time, but yes or no, the sixth hour in Jesus' day meant noon in our day - often the hottest part of the day.

John 4:5-42 - Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew **the gift of God** and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied. 18 Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit

and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now **the reaper** draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

Many Samaritans Believe

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers.

42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Thank you, Molly. Reading between the lines, this part of our Lenten Road Trip is full of Burma Shave roadside signs. The biggest issue between Jews and Samaritans was where God should be worshiped. Jews thought it should only and ever be in Jerusalem. The Samaritans believed that Mt. Gerizim was the worship place chosen by God. Could it be that Jesus “planned” to meet this woman, who happened to be a Samaritan, at the famous base of Mt. Gerizim?

The differences between Jews and Samaritans, and their holy places of worship, resulted in different versions of their sacred scrolls, making that the second strong point of contention. And yet, despite all the historic reasons not to, the disciples had gone on ahead to buy food in Samaria. Maybe they were embracing more of Jesus’ message about reaching out and risking, rather than the safety of keeping to themselves.

Although there is no definitive proof that Jacob built the well, Christians have preserved the site, building churches over it to protect and preserve its sacred nature. But Samaritans also accept the general location; Muslims have historically acknowledged this was the real deal, and Jewish people continue to recognize its traditional location.

There’s so much that could be pulled from this passage, but there’s one part of a sentence that popped out that made me go back - more than once - to catch its meaning. It’s in verse 10, Jesus’ reply to the woman’s point about breaking traditional and spiritual boundaries. "If you knew **the gift of God** and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "If you knew the gift of God." "If you knew the gift of God **and** who it is that asks you for a drink...."

Jesus says things about himself in this gospel called John, things like “I am the Bread of Life.” “I am the Light of the World.” “I am the Door.” “I Am the Good Shepherd.” “I Am the Resurrection and the Life.” “I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” “I Am the True Vine.” We don’t know if Jesus was preludeing the list of who he is by referring to himself as the Gift of God. We don’t know if his self-pronouncement was intentional or if it was the writer of John setting us up for potential connections in later portions of this gospel.

At least to this brain, it makes sense. There are billboards and Burma Shave signs all along the roads of life. Whether it’s looking out the car window, watching out the patio door, or catching the optical delights that float through airports, God has plastered our journeys with blessings from which to learn and then give away. Sometimes we recognize those blessings at strange and even unlikely times. Even if you were the only

person in the world, God would still be putting out road signs of blessings. We only have to take them in and share them. So we shall as we pray.

Holy, Holy, Holy, God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, thank you for your endless miles of blessing. Thank you for your gift of roads - literal and metaphorical and the filling of our souls as we travel on them. We are grateful that you are not a God of shame and constraint, but one who knows us intimately and desires us to be formed into the blessings you have always envisioned for us. Forgive us when we lay bare our hearts before you, for those times we didn't listen to the GPS you have given us in heart and mind. Thank you for meeting us where we are, regardless of our past histories, that we may meet you in openness and honesty, as your children, adored and beloved. For all your blessings, all your people say, Amen.