

In Jesus' name. Amen.

People Loved by God,

Our text for meditation this morning is the second half of what is often called "the Woman at the well."

In the first half, Jesus had stopped by the well while the disciples went into the Samaritan town to buy food.

A lone Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water and Jesus asked her for a drink.

The woman seems taken aback that He, a Jewish man, was talking with her, a Samaritan woman.

(Perhaps she was just trying to shut down the conversation, and she could go about her business.)

Jesus ignores this attempt, and offers her a different type of water, the Gospel, welling up to eternal life.

She's doesn't immediately understand, confusing the Gospel for physical water.

Jesus then invites her to go get her husband – thus revealing some of the baggage that she carries.

Jesus knows she has had 5 husbands and now she is living with a man to whom she is not married.

She recognizes Jesus to be a prophet (of some kind) and starts asking questions about the distinction between the worship practices of the Samaritans and the Jews.

And Jesus reveals (He grants her an epiphany) that He is the long-expected Christ.

At which point, our text begins, recorded in the 4th ch. of the Gospel of St. John, beginning at the 27th verse.

As follows in Jesus' name:

Just then His disciples came back. They marveled that He was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to Him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "**My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.** Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? **Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.** Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, '**One sows and another reaps.**' **I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.**"

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, **and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.**"

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

This is a great text for this Third Sunday of Epiphany's theme on "evangelism" because we not only get to hear Jesus teaching His disciples about sharing the good news, we also get a great example of it.

...

When His disciples returned from buying food in town, remember how Jesus refused to eat?

He said that He **had food to eat that they did not know about.**

Again, there was confusion about what He was talking about and what they were thinking.

His food was: **to accomplish the works of His heavenly Father who sent Him.**

This is what invigorated Jesus, it was His "bread and butter," we might say.

And then Jesus taught them about the importance of the work using the analogy of the harvest:

1. that **the fields are white**, meaning that the people are ready to hear the Gospel,
2. that there are those who **sow**, meaning that they plant the seed of God's Word,
& 3. that there are those who **reap**, meaning that they gather together these souls
and prepare them for eternal glory... again, by preaching of Jesus' work of salvation for sinners.
We also get a sense for how multifaceted this work is as Jesus speaks of the **sower** and the **reaper**
both working together, the reaper entering into the sower's labor, reaping what he has not sown.

...

So we also get the sense that this sharing the Gospel can be work.... And hard work...

Not necessarily on the body (unless you do it like St. Paul),
but on the mind & heart as fear & love wrestle with each other.

But "work" is not bad. In fact, it can be invigorating.

Think of the Garden of Eden. Even before the fall, God gave man work to do in the garden.

It wasn't a drudgery for him, and he certainly benefited from it.

But when sin entered the world and the ground was cursed, then came the thorns and thistles.

Then it was by the **sweat of his brow** that man would **eat**. Genesis 3:19

When you confess your faith to others, realize that you are working on *thorn infested ground*. ELH #138:3

The sinful nature does not like the Gospel, not our own sinful nature,
nor the sinful nature of those to whom we would speak. — In fact, it is hostile to God.

But this work can also be invigorating, enlivening for our new man.

Just as you are able to eat the fruits of your sweaty summer labors at harvest time,
so when you see the comfort... the joy... the relief... and the excitement of others
who receive the Gospel, it energizes you, it excites you, and encourages you to continue.

...

Jesus taught that the fields are ripe.

The farmer who sees the ripe fields but puts off harvesting until the skies turn gray is foolish.

When the Lord opens an opportunity to speak of Jesus to a hurting or despairing soul,
and because of your own fear of rejection... or coldness toward that person... or
your own assessment that that person would not listen to the Gospel... or whatever the excuse,
and you say nothing... and let that person suffer without their Savior, this is not right... its not loving.

And hearing that the fields are ripe right now might give you a sense of urgency...

or even the feeling of fear that the situation is an emergency,
so that you can frantically harvest in whatever way you might consider to be best or most effective.

It can be tempting to put your trust in animated personalities, memorized programs, or a person(pastor),
as if one or more of these things will save us from stagnant or declining church membership,
as if church membership is the most important thing, over and above that person's life & salvation.

The fields have always been ripe... souls are always in need of hearing the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

But the Lord of the harvest has given us very clear instructions:

the Church is to make disciples (that is, sow and reap the harvest)

by **baptizing... and by teaching all that He has commanded**. St. Matthew 28:18-19

After all, **Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of God**. Romans 10:17

So it isn't by snappy church programs. It isn't by one's charismatic personality.

It isn't even by the dedication or the amount of effort that you or your pastors put in
that reaps the harvest ... that grows the Church.

As Jesus said, **you reap for that which you did not labor.**

It is the Holy Spirit nurturing the sown Word, working on hearts, leading them to repentance, giving and strengthening them in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In other words, the Church grows by grace.

And by grace He would work through you, His child, speaking to people, confessing your Savior. He will ready the fields white for harvest at the proper time.

... And isn't that what we see happen in this account.

Who would have guessed that this woman would have been the one God chose to sow the seed?

She came out in the middle of the day for water, probably an indication that she desired to avoid the water cooler conversations that inevitably happen, maybe on account of her immoral reputation.

... What induced the people to listen to her and come out to hear Jesus, wasn't her personality.

It wasn't that Jesus taught her specifically what to say to the people.

We're told the people initially believed her words – what she confessed about Him.

And it probably didn't hurt that she was genuinely excited and joyful...

fruits of her believing the words that she herself was speaking.

If you get a feeling or a sense of urgency to speak to others, this is not wrong; we certainly don't know when God will take anyone out of this world.

But as with this woman, let it be that you speak to others with genuineness and with joy out of love for your Savior and neighbor,

and not out of fear, as if their salvation completely depended on you.

Know that none of God's elect will ever be lost to Him.

But certainly, be a diligent farmer, don't wait until the dark clouds come in, until the person is near death before you ever mention anything about their Savior.

Instead, enter into this work with prayer, patience, diligence, and love,

remembering and rejoicing in the good news for yourself, making your confession of Jesus genuine.

After all, Jesus is the **Savior of the world**. He is your Savior, too.

The sinful baggage from your past that you have been carrying around, – that weighs you down – leave that at the cross and be unburdened of it, Jesus has taken it upon Himself and died for you.

He knows your fears of saying the wrong thing, the fears that paralyze you from confessing Him, and He has bled for each one of them.

Take heart, He has washed you in that blood and cleansed you from all sin.

And what is more, He has given to you His perfect righteousness,

His God-pleasing trust in the Lord and in His goodness.

People Loved by God,

The Lord has given you all you need to speak to those around you. He has given you Jesus.

He has covered over your past, taken your baggage, and made you His child, a member of His family.

It's just like telling your friends what a great brother you have,

only better... because He is their brother... and their Savior, too.

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria