

One of the things about me that gets on my wife's nerves is my tendency to have a song for just about every experience I have. Just about everything reminds me of a song. Forgive me, Bev. But all week, as I have been reflecting on the Samaritan woman at the well, I have been singing a song made famous by the Romantics, an eighties band:  
{{I hear the secrets that you keep when you are talking in your sleep."}}

  {{Secrets that you keep." The woman at the well is overwhelmed by Jesus because {{he told [her] everything [she had] ever done." Everything! He knew her in her depths-the stories that she could easily acknowledge and the secrets that she kept.

Now I have to admit that this woman at the well has often been given a bad rap. As has been the case throughout history for many women, she has been viewed as one of the {{bad girls." It seems that throughout history, especially that history dominated by males, women have been seen as either {{good girls" or {{bad girls." The Samaritan woman at the well is seen as one of the {{bad girls." The secrets that she keeps must have to do with her immoral behavior. She's been naughty. She has moved from husband to husband, and now she is simply {{shacking up" with some man. Doesn't Jesus say today, {{The man you have now is not your husband"? She must be *living* with him.

Well, let's take that idea on first. The people of Jesus' day wouldn't get this {{living with" somebody concept. That is a thoroughly modern concept. Who knows why she is living with the man Jesus mentions? Jewish law provided that if a woman lost her husband to death her brother-in-law would take over the responsibility for providing for her. Maybe she is living with her brother-in-law. Maybe a long lost uncle has moved in with her. Who knows? The text doesn't

tell us. But this is for sure. Jesus is not identifying and condemning her as one who is {{living with" a man.

And who knows for sure what the implications of Jesus' statement, {{You are right in saying, 'I have no husband;' for you have had five husbands," are. Modern Americans who often interpret the faith through moralistic lenses jump to the conclusion that this woman 'must be a real floozy. She goes from man to man. The text doesn't say that. It simply says that she has had five husbands. They could have all died. Who knows for sure?

But this is for sure. She *is* an outcast. John tells us that she comes to the well at noon. Most women would come to the well in the morning when it wasn't so hot. Carrying water is a tough job. You wouldn't want to do it at noon, the time when the sun is burning bright, unless you want to avoid the crowds, unless you are an outcast. Without a doubt, the woman at the well is an outcast--and I would point out, an outcast among outcasts. For Jews of Jesus' day Samaritans were hated people. They had been hated for centuries. You didn't interact with them. As John tells us, {{you didn't share things in common with them." Jesus as he goes to the well is meeting an outcast among outcasts.

Again, we don't know for sure why this woman is an outcast in her community. Maybe she *has* made some mistakes, chosen poorly. Maybe! But frankly, in Biblical days when a bunch of bad things happened to people these folks were thought to be cursed by God for their sins. Maybe the woman at the well was thought to be cursed because she had lost all of these husbands. Who knows?

But the real issue in John is not this woman's background or her morality but the fact that Jesus knows all about her. {{Hetold me

everything I have ever done." The focus in today's reading is on Jesus, one who is said to be the living water, said to be the Messiah, said to be the Savior of the world. He is at the center of what needs to be *said* today.

Jesus knew the woman, inside and out. He knew what she revealed, and he knew the secrets that she kept. He knew her, and he received her—a woman, a Samaritan, a person who seemed to be left out of her own left out community. He crossed the boundaries. He broke down the walls. He eliminated the barriers and gave this woman life-giving water.

*This* is the Messiah, *this* is the Savior that **we** meet today. We come to this place and to this time revealing some of our story and hiding some of it. We come to this place armed with secrets that we have kept. Who knows? Maybe some of the secrets that we keep may have to do with things that we have done. Maybe we cheated on our spouses. Maybe we have been nursing an addiction to alcohol that we have tried to keep the lid on for a long time. Maybe an interest in pornography has become an addiction. Maybe we've abandoned children. Maybe we have run away from responsibilities. Maybe we have hurt people deeply.

Or maybe the secrets that we keep don't have to do with what we've done. Maybe they have to do with what has been done to us. Maybe we have been scarred by others. Maybe others have left a terrible imprint on us. Maybe the secrets we keep just have to do with who we are. Maybe shame about who we are permeates all that we do. Maybe we carry that shame into every encounter we have with people. We would rather hide from them. We would rather not show up where other people gather. If we avoid the crowds, if we avoid

getting involved, if we avoid going to events where people are, if we avoid making relationships, if we avoid letting people into our lives, maybe then the secret won't get out-the secret that we are scarred people, hurting people, grieving people, anxious people, people who are really quite frightened by people, people whose sexual identity is different than others, people whose mental health is distorted by nasty and unfair mental health disorders. Maybe if we go to the well at noon, we won't be known, we won't be noticed; we'll avoid people who will force us to confront ourselves.

Guess what, folks? You may show up at the well at noon, but Jesus has the tendency to show up at the same time. And guess what? He knows everything about you. He can tell you everything that you have ever done. And guess what? What you have done, what has been done to you, the secrets that you keep, the "you" you want to hide-they really are not the issue. At the well, you meet living water, you meet what brought the world into being, the eternal word that became flesh (a human being), the man who is lifted up high on a cross for the sake of the whole world. At the well, you meet what life is all about .. You meet the love of God. And that love receives you-you with your stories revealed and your secrets kept. It receives you and embraces you.

You know, it's interesting. At the beginning of today's gospel lesson we confront a woman who is hiding, a woman who comes to the well at noon to avoid contact with people. At the end of the story, this same woman leaves her water jar (that which defined her task for the day) and went out among the people of the town telling everybody what Jesus had done for her. {"Many Samaritans from the city," we are told, "believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony."}

Be careful, folks! You show up at the well and meet Jesus there, you may be given power that you could never imagine. At the well, love will receive you and then send you on your way, get you out of your Lazy Boy, take you out among people, connect you to community, free you up to make a difference in the world, compel you to share with others the love that you have met and received. And the church will 'grow as you are sent forth. And many will say to you, as the church grows, that it is no longer because of what **you** said that they believe. No, they will say that they have heard the good news for themselves. It has become real for them. Love has met them at the well and filled them with living water, with life that truly has no ending.