

**“Living Water that Lasts”**

**Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-42**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**March 15, 2020 (the Third Sunday of Lent)**

Eleven times I have stood on the summit of Colorado’s Quandary Mountain, usually with church youth who had not imagined successfully peaking a fabled fourteener. The lesson that I learned on the first climb, in 1974, made the difference on all of the others. Inexperienced guides, who had misrepresented to me their familiarity with the mountain, led us across a dangerous slope of rocks rising precipitously over the valley far below.

If you had known that, would you have chanced following such guides?

For about three hours I feared losing 30 kids in an avalanche of stone. To be sure, the climb up Quandary is challenging, at high altitude, but it is in fact one of the easiest of the fourteeners if you slowly switchback on the broad east face. The dangerous route is that steep angle of never-ending, unstable rocks on the south slope. Because that route only invites trouble, I never went that way to the peak again.

That’s what the disciples insisted when Jesus decided to cut through Samaria, on his way north to Galilee from Jerusalem: That route only invites trouble, so they never went that way.

The distance from Jerusalem to Galilee is something like 60 miles. Think of it as a journey from here to Gettysburg. The quickest and most direct way would be to take I-270 to Route 15 in Frederick, and on up past Thurmont and Emmitsburg to Gettysburg. If you walked it, like travelers of the first century would, it would require two to three days, at a brisk pace. But walking along busy expressways is fraught with danger, and not legal in our present day! It is almost guaranteed to invite trouble!

The safer route, though less direct, would be to turn left onto the pike out of our parking lot, head north past Chuck and Pierrette's house, through Urbana and Frederick toward Walkersville, and stick to back roads winding north into Pennsylvania and on to Gettysburg. Though less dangerous, it could take four or five days.

What was so dangerous about Samaria? Enormous dislike had built up between the Jews and the Samaritans. Four centuries prior, the Jews of Samaria—unlike those of Judah and Galilee—had intermarried with their captors, thereby losing their religious and racial purity. Samaritans were known to attack Jewish pilgrims traveling from Galilee south to Jerusalem. You see why then, in another of Jesus's teachings, for dramatic effect, he positions a compassionate Samaritan above Jewish officials as the one who ministers to a victim of roadside violence (the Parable of the Good Samaritan).

By embarking upon the more direct route--against custom and advice, virtually inviting trouble--Jesus is breaking the rules.

Would you take the chance of following someone like that?

Twelve centuries prior, Jacob had willed to his son Joseph a well, one hundred feet deep, that nourished the communities all around. One can visit Jacob's well to this day. Jesus knew of it, of course, and sought its rejuvenating powers on that hot, parched day walking through Samaria. He was fast becoming known as a holy man, leading a movement that would bring Israel back to God. In the culture of that day, a devout Jewish man would not have allowed himself to be alone in the presence of a woman. And if that was somehow unavoidable, he would surely not have encouraged conversation with her. Such would risk impurity, gossip, accusations of immorality.

And it's not just that the woman is a Samaritan. It is that she is a woman shackled by her past, which Jesus seems to know. She would not be favorably compared to, say, Mother Teresa! The normal time for women to visit the well would be early in the morning or late in the afternoon, the cooler times

of day. This woman came when she would be least likely to meet other women, who would know of her past immoralities. Yet this is the woman of whom Jesus requests refreshment to quench his thirst—“Give me a drink”—the woman with whom Jesus undertakes protracted conversation. The disciples were astonished!

By engaging in such a genuine but forbidden relationship, against custom and advice, virtually inviting trouble, Jesus is breaking the rules.

Would you take the chance of following someone like that?

Where does the conversation lead? *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”* This is one of the early occasions in which Jesus offers a clue to his divinity, and it goes unrecognized, as it often was. Jesus talks at the heavenly level in the Gospels, and people listen at the earthly level. Jesus’s work is precisely to bring the life of heaven to life on earth, but that is consistently misunderstood, and ultimately fatally resisted.

“Living water”, to the Samaritan woman, as to any Palestinian of the time, simply meant “running water”, fresh and clean, as from a healthy river or stream. But Jesus is talking about something quite different. The water Jesus offers will quench your thirst such that you will never be thirsty again. It is a spring bubbling up inside of you, refreshing you with the new life that is coming into the world.—a new world that God is making. As shown by this very encounter and conversation with the Samaritan woman, this ‘living water’, this new life in Jesus, is available to anyone regardless of gender, geography, race, or moral background.

By implicating himself as the chosen instrument of God’s larger purpose for the human endeavor--against custom and advice, virtually inviting trouble--Jesus is breaking the rules.

Would you take the chance of following someone like that?

According to the report in the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel of John, many others did “because of the woman’s testimony...and he stayed there two days, and many more believed because of his word...”

Would you take the chance of following someone like that?