

“My Story”

Rev. Cathi King, July 18, 2010

John 4:1–30, 39–42

“SAVIOR OF THE WORLD” he’s called, in our village. “*Savior*” of the “*World*”. That’s been hard for our community to deal with . . . in practice I mean . . . that he’s not just my savior . . . or our savior . . . but *Savior of the world*.

And yet, when we met him, a year ago, today, that’s what we believed him to be. Who knew that day when I came to draw water . . . like so many days before . . . who knew *that* day would change everything? It has not been an easy change . . . for any of us . . . and some, only a few, say they wish he had never come to our village. Although I wonder if deep down they really do.

IT’S BEEN ONE YEAR SINCE I MET HIM, here at this well, and I’m back at the same time – noon – this time not to draw water, but memories.

I’ve been back several times of course . . . always hoping and yearning that he’ll return. Often I’ve strained my eyes looking off into the distance for him. Over the months since he left us we’ve had so many questions – questions and even disputes that have arisen as we’ve tried to put into practice the things he taught us.

Ironically, some of the people turn to me for answers because I was the first to meet him – it was my story to begin with - I guess that makes them think I have some inside knowledge.

I say ironically because I remember all too well what they used to think of me . . . definitely not a source of knowledge. And I say ironically because I know within myself how little I really know about him.

But maybe that’s why I’m here today on the one year anniversary . . . maybe I think somehow that coming back to the time and the place and reliving the memories might unlock some deeper wisdom . . . shed some light on the path forward for me and for all of us as we try to follow the *Savior of the World*.

I don’t even know when I first noticed him sitting here by the well. It was like he just appeared . . . yet I’m sure he had been sitting there all along.

It wasn’t uncommon for me not to notice men. I had trained myself to keep to myself and to quietly be about my business.

I guess I first noticed him when he asked me for water. He was a Jew and I didn’t want to give him water. I didn’t even know him but I hated him anyway. I hated everything his people had ever said or done to my people. So when this tired thirsty man asked for water I didn’t want to help. That’s the truth. But I cleverly hid my prejudice behind a guilt trip as I reminded him he’d be breaking his own law if he shared my *impure* cup.

Then he started talking about God’s gift and living water and never being thirsty again.

And oh how I realized how thirsty I was . . . thirsty for acceptance . . . thirsty for acknowledgement . . . for respect . . . for companionship . . . I was thirsty for a meaningful relationship and for love . . . thirsty to be recognized in my own right and I was thirsty to make a difference in the life of somebody else. I wanted some of that living water because I was thirsty for life. And then he said, “Go get your husband.”

My husband. And I thought why did it always have to be about the man in my life. Just once, couldn’t it be

about me? My *husband* . . .

Technically I didn't have a husband, although at the time I remember thinking I had *never* really had one.

Of all the men in my life, five of which had legally been "husbands" none of them had ever come close to treating me the way I imagined a husband ought to treat a wife. They provided me security and through them I had a voice.

But each one of them in their own way had stolen a little more life from me . . . they decided what I could and could not do . . . who I could and could not speak with . . . what I should say . . . how I should think . . . and when they were done with me, they released me for someone else to have a go.

Each one had their own idea of how to shape me into the wife they wanted. It's a wonder any of *me* was left at all.

So when this stranger asked me to go get my husband, I didn't lie but I didn't leave either. I simply denied having one.

And he knew. I had never met him before that day, but he knew. He knew my story. Not just the number of men who had been in my life, but somehow he knew more because unlike every other person in my village, including those who called themselves my friends, he offered no judgment . . . no condemnation . . . he knew me in a way I had never been known before. I'd never personally known a prophet, but this man was definitely a seer . . . seeing into my life with perfect vision.

It gave me courage to be known like that . . . freedom.

I found my voice and I asked him the question I had heard the men in my village defending my whole life . . . the question that had shaped so much of the hostility that existed between his people and mine . . . the question on which everything seemed to depend . . . I asked him -and to this day I'm not sure what I really wanted or expected to hear in his answer – I asked him who was worshipping *the right way* – his people or mine.

His answer, amazingly, gave room for both. It changed the essence of the question from *how to* worship to *who is* worshipped. It moved away from mechanics and moved into mystery . . . the spirit and integrity of worshipping God . . . anywhere and everywhere.

It was an answer that could truly lead to peace . . . to new ways of understanding one another . . . an answer that could help us get beyond prejudices and get into the heart of God. But it was so different than anything I had ever known or believed. My ancestors had never taught this kind of freedom in worship – it had always been bound to a right place and right practice.

I remember my head starting to spin and my heart starting to swell . . . I wanted more teaching on this . . . I wanted the Truth to be more fully revealed . . . I wanted the Messiah . . . the Restorer to come.

Unbelievably, he said "I am he."

THE WHOLE CONVERSATION I REMEMBER LIKE A DREAM, abruptly ended when his friends returned with their scornful expressions—I'd seen their look so many times before. I ran from the place – in such a hurry, I left my jar.

I WAS BREATHLESS WHEN I RETURNED TO MY VILLAGE and I wasn't sure what I had even experienced, but I wanted them to come . . . I wanted them to see . . . I wanted them to hear . . . and I believed for the first time in my life that I had a voice and that I could be a part of the conversation . . . the most important one our village had ever had – could this be the Messiah?

Many of them actually came back to the well and met him.

So impressed were we and so unhurried was he that we stayed together for a couple of days, and we, all of us, came to know him as the Savior of the World – not just the Jews . . . not just the Samaritans . . . the *world*.

And then he left. There were other villages to visit . . . other wells to rest beside . . . other lives to save.

THE FIRST COUPLE OF MONTHS AFTER HE LEFT WERE AMAZING. We treated one another differently . . . with patience and compassion. Our worship had heart and passion . . . we really knew who it was we were worshipping. Our conversations were robust and there was room for every voice in them. We had unity of purpose.

We had been . . . all of us . . . blessed with the presence of the savior of the world. But as much as that was our blessing, that was also our problem . . .

Some of us began to become restless. This message was not ours to hoard. He had taught us a whole new way of being together that broke down barriers, and we were keeping it to ourselves. We believed he had come to save the world and we were acting as if he had come to save Sychar *only*. Over time and through prayerful conversation, the elders became convinced that we had to go out with the message and so we did.

We went out into surrounding neighborhoods, villages and cities . . . each of us with bold and faithful vision preached this new way.

Some listened and some believed, but more rejected the message we shared. Fellow Samaritans scoffed at us and Jews mocked us . . . some resisted our story violently. From time to time we were encouraged by those who were ready to receive this living water we longed to share. But seeds of doubt began to spread throughout our community.

Those who rejected our message began to convince some within our ranks that this had been a lie. Samaritans claimed that he was trying to trick us to betray our religious heritage. Jews claimed that he was a fraud . . . a heretic . . . and worse, a blasphemer.

The doubters among us began to break fellowship with us and return to our prior ways. Others urgently pressed that we should go back to the way we were just *after* he left us. Those were the days when we all saw his vision clearly . . . those were the best days – we were all together, unified. And still others continued to encourage the outward mission . . . if we believe he is Savior of the World, the world must hear our story.

AND SO, OUR COMMUNITY IS DIVIDED. Not in the same way it was before, but divided none-the-less. Maybe the only thing we agree on is that we're weary. Weary of being mocked and rejected, weary of fighting and weary of losing our own. And so, here I am, back at the well . . . thirsty for a word from him that will show us the way forward.

It all started with a conversation about water . . . a gift of God that would be, for each who drinks of it a gushing spring that would never run dry. That's what he offered me when I had brought to him prejudice, hatred, and a hard heart.

I came to the well that day resigned to a life defined by others, deprived by others, destined by others; I left the well with hope, with courage, with honor, with a joyful freedom to worship God with my whole heart . . . I left having met the true author of my life . . . the Messiah . . . my savior . . . our savior . . . the savior of the world. That's my story . . . my new story. It's what I know to be true. I have changed because of him. We can change – we *have* changed because of him.

It's a story that binds us together *and* it's a story that must be told, must be *shared* . . . because although the unique circumstances of my story are mine alone, the message of forgiveness, of hope, of peace, of freedom is universal – it's God's gift offered for all.

So yes, we can come together in our own community remembering together, sharing his teachings together, worshipping freely and fully together, *and* that coming together can be like coming to the well again to drink deeply from the source that never runs dry so that refreshed, we can go out and speak our stories . . . rewritten by his story for the sake of all who thirst . . . all who are lost . . . all who are bound . . . all who are blind . . . for the sake and *saving* of the world.

WILL YOU COME TO THE WELL WITH ME? Will you bring to Jesus all that weighs you down . . . all that wears you out? Will you drink deeply of the abundant grace he offers and come away changed? Let's come together. Together, let's respond to God's love by accepting the free gift of his healing grace: meant for you, meant for me, meant for all.