

Saturday, March 25, 2017 - Day 83 – Joshua 16-18, Psalm 70, John 4

There he goes again—showing up in places he was never meant to be, talking to people he was never supposed to talk to, and knowing things he was never supposed to know. That's Jesus in a nutshell. You can look at any part of his ministry and see this pattern from his birth, death and resurrection. The King of kings was never supposed to be born as a little baby to oppressed refugee parents in a stable. The Messiah was never supposed to be hung from a shameful cross next to two common criminals. And people who have died are not supposed to be walking and talking and eating again three days later. But that's Jesus for you.

The story today of the Samaritan woman at the well is just such an example. This woman comes to the well in the middle of the day. We can tell a lot from that detail. Towns would normally have communal wells where all the members would go to draw water and the traditional time to do this would be at the beginning of the day. After all, there would be a whole day's worth of cooking and cleaning that needed to be attended to and there was precious little that could be done without water. So the well in the morning was the most popular place in town. But the woman in our story chose to stay away. And we know later from Jesus' words to her that this is probably no accident. If she has indeed "had five husbands", and the one she was currently with was not her husband, she might have been the subject of some painful judgment and shaming every time she went to get water. Her pain and their treatment of her have very likely placed her outside the margins of her society. Where she finds Jesus—right where he isn't supposed to be.

Indeed, under no circumstances should he be where he is. For one, he is a Jew in Samaria—a place Jews tended to steer clear of. Secondly, their gender differences would have rendered the possibility of a conversation impossible since it was socially unacceptable for unrelated men and women to converse. Finally, this woman would have been deemed ritualistically "unclean" by her relationships and to associate with her would have made him likewise impure. This whole scene should not have happened were it not for Jesus' propensity for showing up at the wrong time in all the wrong places to be with all the wrong people.

And thank God he does.

As the woman in our story finds out, Jesus comes to us even if we know beyond a shadow of our own doubts that he has no business spending time with us and changes everything. He comes to us when others have shamed us and our actions have caused us guilt and grief. And he does not offer platitudes or harsh judgments that might rend us unable to hope for the water of life he offers. Instead, he knows us, loves us, and asks for our help in giving that same water to others. Even if that means that we will have to go to places that we have no business being and doing things that we would normally never do and be with people we never thought we would be with. So as you drink from the water of life, be prepared to follow Jesus where you never thought you would. Because that's life with Jesus for you.

By The Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining