

**Homily for March 14, 2004
Third Sunday of Lent A Cycle**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Exodus 17:3-7
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8
John 4:5-42**

We trust that God works even through our failures.

The unnamed woman Jesus encountered at the well in Samaria was a seeker. She experienced the thirst of every human from every age: union with God. Imperfect flesh seeks perfection, mortal people seek immortality, creatures seek the creator. Saint Augustine simply said, “Our hearts are restless till they rest in thee.”

But like everybody, the Samaritan woman sought her fulfillment in the external realm, in things outside of herself. She had to keep “coming to the well” to slake her thirst. Perhaps she believed that a man (Mister Right!) could satisfy her longing for happiness. After all, she had tried out five...and none of them had gotten the job done.

Jesus directed the woman’s attention to the true source of her happiness and her fulfillment: the divine fountain of life that springs up within every human experience. Despite everything she’d ever done, God was pleased to dwell in her, blessing her with life, happiness, and fulfillment. It remained for her simply to drink, to trust, to receive what God already wished to give...and she, in turn, would change the world she touched.

This woman is so inspired and inspired by Jesus that she can’t wait to rush off and tell everyone she meets that she has met the messiah. And the townspeople come to hear Jesus and invite him to stay for two days, and then tell the woman that they no longer need her testimony because they have heard the good news from Jesus’ own mouth.

Here’s a woman with a sullied reputation selling Samaritans on a Jewish messiah – and they believe her and come to witness the good news for themselves. Something in her witness had to inspire them as well. What was the difference in this ordinary woman? What is the author of Saint John’s gospel telling us here? Surely it’s no accident, especially in the society for whom John was writing, that the protagonist here is not only a Samaritan, but also a woman. Look past the gender and see the model: one of the ignored, the voiceless, the derided. Yet she becomes the voice of good news, and she is believed. And this – all of this – is God’s doing, God’s good deed. It was nothing inherent in the woman that made her believable.

Rather, it was the power of the Spirit working through her – yes, through all of her foibles and failures too – that invited and brought about the transformation of many. She didn’t ask for favors or curing – she didn’t even apologize for her lifestyle, and God worked through her.

Now let's look at Jesus' disciples – all of them hand-picked by the Savior to carry on his mission. They leave him at the well and head into town to find some food. When they return, they find a Jesus just as changed as the woman had been. Imagine how gratifying it must have been for Jesus to be believed, to be accepted unconditionally by someone in faith and trust. It's certainly something that happened infrequently to Jesus – after all, this woman just believed, she trusted and went to spread the good news. Now here come the disciples back, marveling at Jesus' cryptic remark about having bread they knew nothing of.

How God loves us all! The most damaged, the most unexpected, the most clueless – these are the chosen ones. We are the chosen ones, as is anyone to whom the Lord wishes to reveal Himself. It's a good Lent, a joyous Lent, if our penance and failures in penance open us to see and to trust that God is present in all the events of life. We rejoice in this good and marvelous news and give praise to the Father.

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through our failures.