

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Jesus' travels offered Him an opportunity to interact with various people, various sorts of people, some ordinary, some respected, some rejected.

Today, our Gospel finds Jesus traveling north from Judea to Galilee (John 4:3). Jesus decided not to take the long way around, east of the Jordan River, that would have kept Him in respectable company. Rather, He traveled straight north through Samaria!

It might seem a rather odd decision given that Jesus wasn't hurrying anywhere. Ordinary Jews might travel through Samaria if they were in a hurry, say, to get to Jerusalem, but Jesus was going the opposite way. Still, the evangelist John reports in the verse preceding our text that Jesus "*had to pass through Samaria*" (John 4:4), that it was necessary.

What might have been His purpose? That this encounter with the Samaritan woman might take place? That He might interact with this less-than-respectable, rejected Samaritan? I think that's likely. It gave Jesus an opportunity to instruct this woman on true worship; it gave Him an opportunity to reveal Himself to her and for her to believe; it gave her an opportunity to bear witness to Him.

Jesus taught that those who want to worship the Father truly, "*must worship [Him] in spirit and truth.*" And He gives us clues to what this means.

The Samaritan woman was impressed with Jesus. Just talking to her was a surprise, let alone asking her for a drink. "*How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?*" If you didn't know, John tells us the reason for her surprise: "*For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*" In this conversation, the woman came to the conclusion that Jesus was "*a prophet.*"

So she offered this observation: "*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you [all] say that in Jerusalem is the place where [it is necessary] to worship.*" Here was Jesus' opportunity to teach her true worship. The woman tied true worship to a place. So did the Jews. But not Jesus.

"*Believe me,*" Jesus said. Here is Jesus exuding authority again, as I mentioned last week. The Samaritans were wrong; the true worship didn't have to take place on Mount Gerazim. The Jews were wrong, too; the true worship didn't have to take place on the temple mount. The true worship of the Father would have to be done not in connection to buildings made with hands, but in connection with the true temple that had been raised up by God in the flesh and dwelt among us, the temple that, Jesus had taught, would be destroyed and in three days raised back up.

On both of these mountains lambs and goats and bulls were being sacrificed! But none of these could truly atone for sins (Heb. 10:4); they only pointed ahead to

the salvation that would come from the Jews, even the Lamb of God without blemish, born of the Virgin, who would bear the sins of the world and who shed His blood as a self-offering for our guilt.

True worship bows the knee not to some generic God, but to this Lamb who was *“led [silently] to the slaughter”* (Isa. 53:7), to the servant who *“was pierced for our transgressions ... [and] crushed for our iniquities”* (Isa. 53:5). True worship confesses Him as Lord who humbled Himself *“by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,”* and *“humbled himself [further] by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:7-8).

“True worshipers,” Jesus told the woman, *“will worship the Father in ... truth,”* that is, by looking to Jesus, the Truth, without whose revelation no one can know the Father (Matt. 11:27), without whom no one can come to the Father. As Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also”* (John 14:6-7).

“True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit” also, for it was only by the Spirit’s descent upon Jesus that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the world’s sacrificial Lamb, the Son of God who would Himself baptize by the Spirit; it was by the Spirit’s anointing that Jesus took up the mantle of Christ; it’s only by the Spirit, who proceeds from the Son, that we ourselves recognize Jesus and confess Him as Lord and God, Christ and Savior.

Jesus told the woman, *“the hour ... is now here,”* that is, the hour had arrived with the coming of Jesus broadly, and it will come to its climax when the Son of Man is lifted up unto the death of the cross, for, as we heard last week, thus is the love of the Father expressed (John 3:14-16), and *“this is the will of [the] Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life”* (John 6:40).

The hour is now for us, too, who gather together today for worship, for Jesus is here in His word and His Sacrament. Yes, this is enough for us to say, we have worshiped *“in spirit and truth,”* for as Bill Weinrich said in his commentary, *“the confession of Jesus as the Son is the constitutive reality of worship of the Father ‘in Spirit and Truth’”* (Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1:496*)

True worship is especially also to drink of the water that Jesus gives, *“a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* But Jesus is not just the One who gives living water; He is the source. Jesus said, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and let him who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”* (John 7:37-38 alt. trans.). Jesus said this *“about the Spirit,”* whom He Himself would send from the Father (John 15:26). Again, remember, it is Jesus in St. John’s vision of *“the holy city, new Jerusalem”* who gives *“from the spring of the water of life without payment”* (Rev. 21:6).

The woman rightly said, “*give me this water,*” though she didn’t fully understand what or how. Jesus performed a sign for her: “*You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.*” That impressed her. It would prompt her later to respond: “*When he comes, [that is, the Messiah, who is called the Christ,] he will tell us all things.*” And later yet to bear witness: “*Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?*”

Jesus had answered her: “*I AM,*” but that seems to have gotten lost amidst the signs. Oh, well. That’s why He did signs—that she might believe. “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20:30-31).

Dear friends, we’re here to worship in spirit and truth, and you should praise God for our worship, let me even say for our liturgical worship form, for from beginning to end, the Holy Trinity permeates our worship. We worship “one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance” as we confess in the Athanasian Creed. And this is good, for this is “the catholic faith” apart from which there is no salvation; this is worship of the Father “in spirit and truth.”

More than that, our worship is centered on Christ, on His sacrifice, on the forgiveness of sins through faith in Him alone. True worship is intertwined with faith and the forgiveness of sins. The Apology says, “faith is that which freely obtains God’s mercy because of God’s Word. If anyone denies that this is faith, he does not understand at all what faith is. . . . The [sinful] woman [who anointed Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair] came with the opinion that forgiveness of sins should be sought in Christ,” and the Apology concludes, “*This worship is the highest worship of Christ.* She could think nothing greater about Christ. To seek forgiveness of sins from Him was truly to acknowledge the Messiah. To think of Christ this way, *to worship Him this way, to embrace Him this way, is truly to believe*” (Apology IV:154).

So this is true worship, not just to believe, for how many people have I talked to that claim to believe and yet despise preaching and God’s word? No, true worship, worship in spirit and truth, is the “faith . . . that receives the benefits offered by God.” For “God wants to be worshiped through faith so that we receive from Him those things He promises and offers” (Apology IV:49).

Therefore, I encourage you . . . be faithful. As true worshipers, look to Christ, to His flesh, to His cross. Be faithful. Look to receive from Him what He offers by word and sign, that is, water and supper, namely, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And then bear fruit by bearing witness. Let us worship truly — worship in spirit and truth.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.