

March 8, 2026

John 4:5-42

The Woman at the Well

Good morning! About a month ago, Father Kelly and I were meeting in his office to choose a Sunday for me to preach. He told me that March 8<sup>th</sup> would be great and since it was his birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup>, he could have some time off. I told him, "Fine, that will be my birthday present to you." He told me, "Oh, you still will need to get me a present!"

Happy birthday, Father Kelly...this is it!

We then looked at the Gospel reading for this Sunday, and here we are with one of my favorite stories, Jesus and the Woman at the Well. I jumped up and said, "That's great!! I WAS the woman at the well!

Poor Father Kelly, it will take him a while to get used to me.

Until we meet the Living God and Savior, we are all the woman at the well.

This is a very special passage for several reasons;

First of all, Jesus is speaking to a woman and this was simply not done back in this time. A man would never initiate a conversation with a woman. Women had no rights and were considered as property by men.

Secondly, she is a Samaritan and Jews would go to any length to avoid Samaritans and Samaria. This goes back to a time when the Assyrians defeated Samaria and took many of them captive. Those that remained in Samaria intermarried with non-Jewish people, compromising their bloodline and thus their ethnic identity. The Judeans were captured by the Babylonians and maintained their identity while in captivity. When they returned to Judea, the Jews built the temple and rejected the Samaritans so the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizem.

Thirdly, she is coming for water at the hottest time of the day. Water gathering was a social event for women and it usually took place in the cool of the morning. It was a time of socializing with other women before returning to more isolated chores. Also, this meant that water would be available to family throughout the day. The fact that she is alone shows us that perhaps she was an outcast even in her own group. Maybe because of the number of husbands, she has had and the fact that she is in a relationship with yet another man who is NOT her husband.

All of these circumstances make the woman's encounter with Jesus life changing for her and for us. For Jesus sees her and knows her and regardless of background and sins, He offers her living water. How many people do we encounter on a daily basis who are forgotten, invisible, and left behind for who they are and for their life circumstances. What do we have to offer them?

Here is Jesus waiting at the well and he begins a conversation with a Samaritan woman that is the longest in the Bible. He asks for a drink and yet he has no cup for drinking.

He sees her...really sees her in her tiredness, in her aloneness, in her hopelessness and in her sin. He sees her hurting heart and He reaches out to her and offers living water.

I was the woman at the well, you were the woman at the well. Until we accept the gift that Jesus gives freely, we are all the woman at the well. Until he gives us the gift of being seen, truly seen, and fiercely loved, we are the woman at the well.

I remember vividly when I dropped all pretenses of my sinful life and stood before Jesus. He didn't need me to fix myself or wait until I had my life together for Him to love me and want a relationship with me. He loved me as I was at that very moment and I was a hot mess at that very moment. The reality that He knew everything about me and still loved me with a love so deep, dropped me to my knees.

Come and see! Come and see the one who knows everything about me!

That was the beginning. Has life been perfect ever since then? Absolutely not! Do I have a savior that walks with me through every trial and tribulation even when I doubt, he is there? Yes! And he continues to show me this every single time.

There is however a next step.

After a time, I learned something else about being seen by God. It meant that I was more aware of my sins and that I needed forgiveness that only God can give. My brain would go back to those horrible sins I had committed before I was saved. The incredible weight of guilt and shame of what I had done that caused pain to me and pain to others. How was I to hand that to God?

A few months later, I was invited to go on a spiritual retreat with some friends from Christ Church. I was still teaching at the time and I looked on that weekend as a time to step away from the craziness and experience rest and peace. I carpoled with my friend; Mimi Allen and we arrived late in the afternoon. Honey Creek was gorgeous. It was clear and breezy and the beautiful oaks and pines were contrasted against a bright blue sky. We settled in our rooms, had a social gathering and then a wonderful dinner. Compline was in the chapel at 7:00pm. We walked from the dining hall to the chapel which was lit up with what seemed like a hundred candles. The worship leader gave us simple instructions. We would participate in compline and then we were free to stroll about the grounds or go to our rooms and read...but we were to practice silence. There was to be no conversation until we met again at 7:00am for morning prayer and then breakfast. The worship leader also mentioned that a priest would be available for confession the next day. I walked and enjoyed all the outdoor time I could until the mosquitos escorted me back to my room.

Now if you have ever spent the night at Honey Creek before the room renovations happened, you might remember that the AC unit comes on with the roar of a jet engine and if your unit wasn't waking you up, the one in the room next door was. I had finally dozed off and then the second curse of Honey Creek struck...the plumbing. All of the sudden, the faucet began to drip, drip, drip and with each drip the echo became louder. I tried putting a

washcloth in the sink and the drip, drip turned in to a plop, plop. And then the word, confession came to my mind. I had not thought about it until then and my mind responded with panic. I could just sneak out quietly now while everyone was sleeping....except for the fact that I didn't have my car. I tried figure out if it would be easier to walk the road to get to I95 or cut through the woods. Why was I panicking? What was I afraid of? Maybe if I participated in confession, I could hand my guilt, sadness and shame that I had carried for so long to God. I had never been to a priest for confession, would that help?

In the next moment I remembered that our spiritual director for the weekend was Father Peter Ingeman, my very own priest. I thought, oh why couldn't it be a priest that didn't know me?? Some priest that I would never have to look in the face again? Why did it have to be my priest that I loved and respected? The panic took over and I realized that I would rather walk over alligator snouts and water moccasins than have my priest learn all the horrible things I had done...

And then, with absolutely no action or thought on my part, a deep peace settled over my mind and body and I knew that Father Peter was the perfect priest to hear my confession. The peace that I received that night without even asking could only come from God. I slept deeply the rest of the night.

Was it easy the next morning to walk to the chapel and sit in the sacristy with Father Peter and go through confession? No, but for me it was the only next step. I knelt down and when I opened my mouth, it all came out in a torrent of tears and when I was finished Father Peter placed his hands on my head and said the pronouncement of absolution and the words; The Lord has put away all your sins.

That was many years ago and have there been sins since then? Oh yes. But I understand now, that just as the woman at the well having been fully seen by God and claimed as one of his own, I can continue to get on my knees and ask for forgiveness. Lent is a wonderful time as we prepare for the death and resurrection of our Lord and savior to go to confession, to name those sins that have been holding you back and receive absolution. And if any doubts try and sneak in your mind about if you are truly forgiven, change them into gratitude for the forgiveness you have received by a loving God who sees you and loves you deeply.

AMEN