



TEXTS IN DIALOGUE

A SERMON ON JOHN 4:1-26

Uta Blohm

This morning I'm going to present a slightly changed version of one of my first sermons (the changes are in italics). It's a sermon that I would no longer give in this way. In the sermon, there are problematic references to "the Jews", as they also exist in the biblical text or in the translations. In this new version, I speak of "the Judeans" instead. I had introduced the Psalm that we prayed during the service with the words: "Jews and Christians have gone before us in faith. Let us pray with words from an old prayer." At the time, my aim was to enable an experience of salvation. For this, I used a reference to the Hebrew Bible.

The Sermon

It's hot, very hot around noon. It's crazy to be outside at this time and then to even carry a heavy jug. But the woman could no longer stand it at home. Again a fight, really just about little things. She just wanted to get away. To be alone. So she goes to the well outside of the village. There, a group of strange men comes towards her, not Samaritans but Judeans. They look tired and exhausted and obviously want to go into the village in order to buy something to eat. The woman on her way to the well doesn't pay any attention to them, and she is glad when the men have passed. But then she sees that one stayed behind at the well. He is probably waiting for the others to return.

She is annoyed, as she had hoped she'd be able to be alone. After all, usually at this time nobody goes to the well. Altogether, it is an embarrassing situation. Samaritans and Judeans *have little to do with one another*. And it wouldn't exactly be helpful if word got around that she was alone at the well with a man. On the other hand, she feels sorry for the man. He's sitting there at the well, thirsty, and he doesn't even have a jug to draw water. She could lend him hers, of course. No, in no way will that happen! She may not speak to him.

"Give me something to drink." – What? Surely she didn't hear right. He is speaking to her. "You're from Judea. How come you're asking me, a Samaritan woman, for water?" – "If you knew what God wants to give you and who is asking you for water, you would ask me for living water, for water that you need for life, and I would give it to you." – What's he talking about now? There's living water in the well. Water you can drink, so not rainwater from the cistern. The whole village lives of the water in this well, including the animals. "But Sir, you don't have anything with which

you can draw water, and the well is deep." – "Everyone who drinks this water will soon be thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never again be thirsty. This water will become a spring in that person which pours out into eternal life." – That would certainly be very practical. Never again to be thirsty, never again to have to draw water. The woman is slightly amused. "Then give me this water so that I'm never thirsty again and don't have to come to draw water." – "Go and call your husband. Then both of you come here."

Then she suddenly becomes serious. Her whole frustration over the past years rises up in her. For the sixth time she's living a relationship with a man. That's how much a separation in a relationship can be the lesser evil. Nobody survives the shattering of their own dreams entirely undamaged. Every time she resolved: This time it will be better. This time it will work out. She wanted to still her life's thirst in these relationships, and every time she was again disappointed. Every time she had been hurt a bit more. "I don't have a husband." – "That's true, because you've had five husbands, and the one whom you have now is someone else's husband." – "Yes, that's it exactly," she thinks. And then she waits. Will he reproach her? Will he give her clever advice? But nothing like that happens.

She realizes: this strange man knows me. He knows the story of my life. But he's not making fun of me. He's not using his knowledge in order to beat me up. He's not asking me to change my life. I don't have to deny the story of my life. He accepts me unconditionally. Not only that. He understands me as well. He understands my loneliness.

She heaves a sigh of relief. Now she feels better. She is no longer depressed like at the beginning of her journey. She feels liberated. Then it becomes clear to her: he gave me living water just as he had promised. She remembers a sentence, a lament to God that she has heard before. "They have abandoned me, the source of living water, in order to dig for themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns that don't hold the water." (Jer 2:13)

I have found new courage. In reality, I always thought that God isn't for me. In reality, I'm not pious. But today I have understood something of this old lament. God suffers because of my loneliness. God has given me my life and doesn't want me to lose myself in poor hopes. I believe God sent me this man at the well. He has liberated me from the narrowness of this life. (*I have encountered God in a Judean.*)

"You are a prophet, a man of God," she exclaims. Then she notices the other men who have returned. They look somewhat surprised that he is speaking with her. The woman notices this. And she decides that it is probably better for her to go. Or more precisely, she runs, she almost dances. She has completely forgotten her water jug. She tells of this encounter in the whole village. "I found someone who understands me. He knew my entire life. He comes from God (*a Judean*). Perhaps he is the Messiah for whom we have been waiting for so long." She realizes that she wants to pass on to others what Jesus has given her. It becomes a living spring in her. Others around her are also lonely, just as she was. She can open her heart to them.

Translation: Sr. Katherine Wolff