

Focus on John 4:5–42

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Karoline M. Lewis

The Samaritan woman at the well is not a passive recipient of Jesus’ offer. She immediately recognizes the societal barriers and boundaries that keep her in her place (v. 9); but at the same time she challenges Jesus’ authority over and against the ancestors of the faith (v. 12). Like Nicodemus, she first interprets Jesus’ words on a literal level. However, she also recognizes that Jesus has something that she needs and is able to ask for what Jesus has to offer, rather than question the possibility (v. 15).

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by George W. Stroup

Jesus is indeed the “son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know” (6:42). The appearance is not deceiving, but that is not the full truth about Jesus. He is at the same time “the Word” that “was with God” and “was God” (1:1). It is no accident that John’s Gospel dominates the early church’s understanding of Jesus and figures prominently in the formula of Chalcedon. Jesus is both “fully human and fully God,” but the mystery of his identity is that he cannot be the Word that was God without also being the son of Joseph. From “the beginning” the son of Joseph was the Word made flesh. John tells his Gospel the way he does, not because he is fond of irony. The story that he tells demands irony.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Deborah J. Kapp

This story narrates the dramatic transformation of the woman. She begins the story as an outsider and becomes a witness; from her status as a beginner in faith she becomes an apostle sent by Jesus himself to testify on his behalf. As such she is a model for other women, for people who feel like nobodies, for newcomers to the faith, and for people with a past. Jesus encounters and welcomes many into the household of faith—even the least likely and maybe, even, you and me.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Anna Carter Florence

There is something beautifully simple in the staging of this scene as well as its premise: Jesus is thirsty at the well, and we are the ones with the bucket. The deeper metaphorical conversation that follows makes no sense until we really take this in. Can a little thing like a cup of cool water, offered in love, be the beginning of a salvation journey? Yes; and we will never know until we meet the stranger, and tend to the human need first.