

Lent 3: March 19, 2017
John 4:5-42

In the name of our God, who knows what we need before we ask.

“What are you looking for?”

This is the third week of Lent. If we plot it out linearly, we are over half way through our Lenten journey. In this season of reflection and intention, we press on, moving closer to Holy Week, to the time we will walk step by step next to Jesus through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and into Easter. We press on, deeper into this mysterious season when we remember Christ’s, passion, death and resurrection and the greatness of His love.

What are you looking for?

This question is the first Jesus asks in the gospel of John. Jesus asks a lot of questions in the gospels, but in this passage, which includes one of the longest conversations in our gospels, Jesus asks no questions. He asks no questions of this Samaritan woman. He *tells* her, to get him water and that she’d be asking questions of him, if she knew who he was. If she knew who she was talking with she would ask him about the living water, the kind that doesn’t come from a well, that this man, she runs across one day, has.

After Jesus says this, most of the rest of what she says is questions. And it could be, this is what Jesus is going for—Jesus knows this woman, he knows about her husbands or lack of, and he knows that living water is what she is looking for, deep-down, it’s what she desires most. Jesus knows, as God, that she will also be a wellspring of salvation for her people.

Over the centuries, the stories about this woman have evolved. She’s not named in the gospel, which is not unusual for John, not even the Mother of Jesus is named. But the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates this woman, tomorrow on March 20th. They have given her a name, St Photini, which means the luminous, or enlightened one. In icons, she can be referred to as “The Great Martyr Equal to the Apostles.” She is compared to the apostles, and some early Greek Christians describe her willingness to share the Good News as beyond the apostles.¹ These 41 verses we heard illustrate a woman who some call the first evangelist—sharing a well that has sprung up in her, witness to the salvation Jesus brings and, as we heard, she changes the hearts of her fellow Samaritans.²

We have a prayer in our prayer book, a collect to conclude the prayers of the people and it begins: Almighty God, to whom our needs are known before we ask.

¹ <http://www.orthodoxchristian.info/pages/photini.htm>

² <http://www.antiochian.org/st-photini-samaritan-woman>

God knows what we need before we ask. God knows how and what we need and how we are needed to love and serve others. And, Lent, is a time to listen more to what God wants to uncover in us, in how we see the world around us, in how we see God.

Jesus hit the mark with this woman. He gets her to ask questions, that help her discover what she wants most, what she looks for—Jesus knows what is it she seeks and the living water he offers, she asks for, nourishes her in a way she cannot keep to herself.

The questions we ask are important. I ran across something that said in 2011, the most popular google question was, “What is love?” I was struck by this, I then looked at 2016, it was, “What is Pokémon go?” And, I’m sure the conclusion could be spun that this is about building community, how to be in relationship to others who play this game—but I’ll leave that. But there is a question waiting for us, of what we are looking for? This woman found the spring of living water she desires. There are the short-term things—rest, space, breath, peace, trust, love, hope, joy, that we need soon. And then there are those that we see when we’re able to take one step further back—how to age with integrity, how to best support the children in our lives, how to leave a positive mark on creation, the changes we need to make for ourselves. And God knows what these are. God is the one who calls us to them, who puts in us the desire to find the life, the well-spring that Christ gives us.

And when we receive from Christ, it doesn’t stay hidden. This Samaritan woman was given something she could not keep to herself. She shared it with her people and it moved from belief through words, to what she really knew.

What we look for, when we receive even some of it, fills us in a way that overflows, pours out and that changes the environments we move in, walk in. The truth and hope, love and joy, passion and consolation that comes to us from God is one fruit of this Lenten time, or anytime we choose to hear what God would have us hear.

What are you looking for?

There are questions God asks of us—and perhaps there are questions you have for God, Christ, the Holy Spirit that need to be addressed. Anytime is a good for this, but maybe Lent helps us to focus more on what those questions are. It may require courage to face the questions we don’t have the answers to. And we need not fear the questions, God has set them on our heart that we may grow deeper in love and knowledge of God and of all those around us.

This woman was just going to get some water, a task she did everyday, but one day, it was different. And she knew, somewhere what she was looking for, that Jesus could provide. This openness, with questions, causes her to be known as the “luminous one” for centuries after. Something sparked in her that could not be covered up.

To close with the collect from before:

Almighty God, to whom our needs are known before we ask:
Help us to ask only what accords with your will; and those
good things which we dare not, or in our blindness cannot
ask, grant us for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.