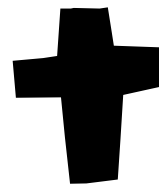




Bringing Home the Word



3RD SUNDAY OF LENT March 27, 2011

Taking Time to Tell Our Stories

By Diane M. Houdek

The Samaritan woman has known pain and disappointment and the restless search for a life of happiness and meaning. She has known the deadening routine of coming each day to the same well for water that will enable her to live just one more day. She thinks sometimes that there must be more to life, if only someone would tell her a new story. But she has heard so many stories and always they end the same way. We, too, thirst for something real, something genuine, something that will refresh us. But in our desperation we often settle for far less than we feel we deserve, because the life we know demands less of us than the life we dream.

She wants to believe, but she fears

yet another disappointment, so this time she wants to be sure. Her opening challenge is filled with suspicion and mistrust. Belief always makes vulnerable lives that are accustomed to strong defenses. And the brutal reality is that at times belief will be disappointed, trust will be betrayed. But Jesus challenges the woman to believe once more, to risk one more time, to give new life one more chance. He challenges her to tell her story, to listen to the story he has to tell, to believe that this time it can be different.

The Lord is never surprised by our restlessness, our disappointment, our fearful, hurting challenges. Just as God calmed Moses' ruffled authority and gave the people water from the rock, Jesus responds to the woman at the well with challenges of his own that promise life and refreshment. Deeper and deeper they reach into the well of self, of faith, of trust, where the living and life-giving water is to be found. Together Jesus and the woman explore the stories of needs and wounds and beliefs.

We might be surprised by this woman's questions about the right place to worship God. This was a big issue for the people of Jesus' day. Many of our friends and family members have questions about religion. We might have questions ourselves. Jesus listens and responds with an openness

to truth that we would do well to remember in the midst of heated discussions. The Gospels remind us again and again that often God's truth is bigger than the little rules that we find so reassuring, those things that tell us that ours is the only way.

Today's Gospel reminds us that at the center of our faith is what has often been called "The Greatest Story Ever Told." We are the stories of our past—stories we tell, stories other people tell about us—but we can *become* the stories God tells for our future. This is the message of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Lent calls us to step aside from our ordinary routines, to spend time listening to God, to believe that we can tell our stories in a new way. The word of God challenges us to explore the story of our faith once more and discover for ourselves that Jesus really is "the savior of the world"—and what this means in our own lives. We come to believe not because others have told us we must, but because our own hearts tell us we must.

This is what we do when we read Scripture, when we gather with others to talk about the Scriptures. We immerse ourselves in the big story, in God's story, and then we see where the stories of our own lives reflect a piece of that story. And in that intersection, we find the living water of faith. ✝

SUNDAY READINGS

Exodus 17:3-7

The people are filled with doubts, but God assures them that they are on the path of life.

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

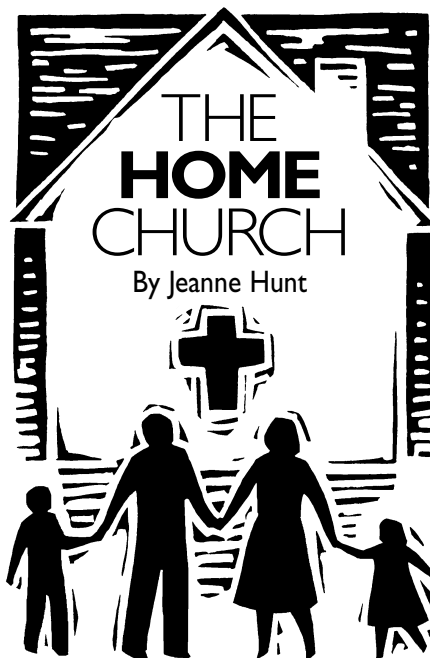
Because of God's love for us, we are able to live lives of faith, hope and love.

John 4:5-42

Jesus reveals to a Samaritan woman that he will provide the water of eternal life.

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- What are you really thirsting for?
- What do you think happened to the Samaritan woman after she left the well?
- What have been some of the most significant changes in your spiritual life this year?
- What does it take to get beyond the things that divide us from one another?



While Lent is a time of purification for all baptized Christians, it becomes a special time for those preparing for Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation at Easter.

This Sunday marks the first of three “scrutinies,” times of intense self-examination for those going through the Rite of Christian Initiation.

The Scriptures for this and the next two Sundays focus on water, light and life. The catechumens and candidates express their commitment to this process and the congregation in turn promises their prayers and support.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a village well and asks her for a drink. This encounter leads to a discussion about the waters of eternal life, waters that the Church recognized as the waters of baptism.

Water is used in the sacrament of baptism to signify cleansing from sin. It is also used at funerals as a reminder that those who have died with Christ in baptism will also rise with him to eternal life.

As Catholics, we bless ourselves with holy water as we enter and leave the church to remind ourselves of our baptisms. Many Catholics also keep a bottle of holy water in their homes for family blessing rituals.

The word *catholic* means universal. One of the things we struggle with as Roman Catholics is this realization that everybody is a part of the church. The doors are wide open. It is an attitude that pervades everything we do. The Samaritan woman’s story really speaks to any aspiring Catholic.

In Jesus’ time, the Samaritans were considered marginal human beings. A woman’s status depended on the men in her life: father, husband, son. Yet Jesus welcomes this Samaritan woman like his best friend. You can imagine the shock of his disciples.

This “catholic” thing means that we are to welcome everyone just like Jesus welcomed the Samaritan woman. The presence of the Catholic Church throughout the entire globe witnesses to this universality. Living water has no restrictions. We need to take on this attitude of Christ in our lives, even to the point of loving and welcoming those who have hurt us or who have criticized us for joining this Catholic Church. We are expected to share this living water with anyone who comes to the well. Jesus never said being Catholic would be comfortable. Yet, the challenge of reaching out to anyone who comes your way is very “catholic.”

PRAYER

Jesus,
lead me to someone
different than me
and allow me
to reach out to them
as you would.
Give me the strength
to open the conversation,
to listen to a stranger
rather than stay
in my comfort zone.
Amen

WEEKDAY
READINGS

Monday	2 Kgs 5:1-15b; Lk 4:24-30	Thursday	Jer 7:23-28; Lk 11:14-23
Tuesday	Dn 3:25, 34-43; Mt 18:21-35	Friday	Hos 14:2-10; Mk 12:28-34
Wednesday	Dt 4:1, 5-9; Mt 5:17-19	Saturday	Hos 6:1-6; Lk 18:9-14