

It was supposed to be the wedding of their dreams! So much had gone into planning this one special day. But nothing could've prepared them for this. You see, it was only the night before the wedding, when the bride's phone was abuzz with some truly disturbing text messages. They were screenshots of very racy texts that her husband-to-be sent to another woman only just recently. Along with these messages, were also selfies of the groom with the other woman. Finally, when the bride scrolled down to the very bottom, there was one simple question waiting for her: "I wouldn't marry him. Will you?"

At first, it seemed like her answer was in the affirmative. The day's events took place as expected. She climbed into her bridal gown, and she and her bridesmaids got ready. She walked down the aisle, escorted by her father. She even took her place next to the groom and stood by him through the beginning of the ceremony.

But then came time for the vows. Turning to her friends and family, she suddenly spoke up, "There will be no wedding today. It seems [the groom] is not who I thought he was." Then, she pulled out her phone and read aloud the very same text messages the mystery woman had sent to her the previous night. Here's an example of one of those texts, "This weekend. You and I. It is on, hot stuff. Bring your A game." Needless to say, "with each word, more color left [the groom's] face." Unable to take any more, he stomped off while his family looked on in horror. The bride concluded by telling her guests, "I love all of you, and as horrible as this is I'm glad you all are here. There will not be a wedding reception today, but instead, there will be a celebration of honesty". True story.

All I can say is, Wow! While my heart goes out to the bride, I can't help but also feel for the groom. Please don't get me wrong—what he did was deplorable and inexcusable, but imagine *your* dirty laundry being aired in public like that! Well, the Samaritan woman in this morning's Gospel reading could tell you exactly what it's like.

I mean, here Jesus strikes up a conversation with her at midday. In broad daylight, he exposes her darkest secrets and her deepest shame. Jesus reveals her shady past, how she's gone through five husbands already—one after another. Now, that is a shocker, because after two failed marriages most rabbis wouldn't consider officiating another one. Even if she was twice widowed, nobody would marry her more than a third time—so it's really scandalous when the total reaches five marriages!

And that's not even it—not only has she been married five times, but the guy she's with now isn't even her husband. This is a big deal, because it means she has a live-in boyfriend, she's cohabitating, she's living in open unrepentant sin. If she's shacking up with some guy, you can pretty much assume there's fornication being committed. I'm afraid many of us today aren't much fazed by this, which goes to show the state of our current society. I can guarantee, however, in her legalistic context, she would be considered depraved, degenerate, debased. And here Jesus is, reading her like a book, giving away all her dirty little secrets.

It's very different from last Sunday. In fact, it's literally a night-and-day difference. Last Sunday, Nicodemus initiates the discussion with Jesus by night. This Sunday, *Jesus* is the one who speaks to a *Samaritan* woman, and it's by *day* no less. Last Sunday, Nicodemus represented the Jews, who considered themselves bright shining examples of uprightness and morality. This Sunday, the Samaritan woman represents their neighbors to the north who were considered practitioners of the works of darkness. Interesting too, last Sunday, Nicodemus—an upstanding Pharisee—was in the dark when it came to the things of God. But this Sunday, it's a wicked Samaritan woman who sees the light and runs off to tell everyone that she'd found the Messiah!

Now, let me explain why the Samaritans are so picked on. You might remember that after King Solomon died and his son reigned as king, the kingdom was split in two. On the hand, there was the Northern Kingdom of Israel (with Samaria as its capital); and on the other hand, the Southern Kingdom of Judah (with Jerusalem as its capital). Well, throughout history Judah proved overall to be more faithful than Israel was. For the most part, fewer of Judah's kings were so

wicked and Judah's people were usually quicker to repent. Compare that to Israel, whose unfaithfulness ultimately led to their destruction.

After a while, the Lord had enough of that, and He allowed the Assyrian Empire to come in and deport most of Israel's population. The majority of Israelites—especially the elites and well-to-dos—were taken captive to Assyria. And to ensure there was nothing left of Israel and that it couldn't possibly rise up in rebellion, the Assyrians settled various pagan peoples into what was formerly Israel. Ever since, any Israelite left behind after the deportation would've interbred with these new peoples and probably even incorporated their idols into their own worship of the one true God. Some historians believe that it was actually five specific nationalities that Assyria transplanted in the land of Israel. And if this Samaritan woman is a symbol of the idolatry of Israel, then her five husbands might symbolize those five foreign nations with whom Israel was unfaithful to God and adulterous with their pagan gods. Then the man she's living with now would symbolize the Roman Empire who was occupying Samaria at the time—where there was even a temple dedicated to the Emperor, Caesar Augustus.

So what all this boils down to is that the adulterous Samaritan woman in the Gospel today is a symbol of Israel's idolatry. Her infidelity with men symbolizes Israel's unfaithfulness to God. John by his symbolism is calling people like her to repentance. Fortunately for us, we're not Samaritans—we don't need to repent.

Or do we?

Remember how the bride read off the groom's texts for everyone to hear? What if Jesus were to stand up here before the whole congregation and read off a list of your sins. Would that be a long list? How much time would that take? Just think how everyone sitting in these pews would react—what would they think of you after that?

Like those text messages exposed the groom's adulteries, every sin exposes your infidelity toward God. I mean, you're a Christian, right, you know the difference between right and wrong. The Bible's told you how life with God should look. But when you choose sin over God, it's like you're saying you love your sin more than Him. Think about how much that hurts God. Consider the pain you put Him through every time He catches you cheating. How should God react after so much spiritual adultery?

My guess is, if your best friend's spouse was treating them like dirt you'd probably try to get them some help. I can guarantee you wouldn't just sit by and let your friend suffer in such an abusive relationship. But when it comes to your relationship with God, how come He's the abused and you're the abuser? What did He ever do to deserve that? Honestly, He should be packing up His bags, moving out, and leaving you in the dust.

But . . . He doesn't.

Look, instead, at what He does. To the Samaritan adulteress, He comes. Any other self-respecting Jew wouldn't dare speak to a Samaritan. They would've spotted the foreigner there and gone looking for a new well. And no other man would dare speak to such an adulteress. If anyone saw them talking, his reputation would be ruined. But that doesn't stop Jesus—a friend of sinners. He comes to win her back.

It's just like the Old Testament—Jesus finding His beloved by a well. It was by a well that Rebekah was found for Isaac. It was by a well that Joseph first laid eyes on Rachel. It was even by a well that Moses found his bride-to-be, Zipporah. Now it's Jesus' turn to prove His love and win back His metaphorical bride, warts and all.

That's what's going on here in this scene between Him and the Samaritan woman. Jesus even uses the well as a sermon illustration. He's come not to judge her sins, but to save her from them. He promises her living water. It's a water that's so alive, it can only come from the source of *all* life, Himself.

When Jesus hangs suspended on the cross, it will be a soldier's spear that opens those floodgates. Out of His side will come pouring a saving flood that covers all of her idolatries and cleanses every one of her adulteries. Every blemish on her record will get washed away. It will be then that all of her thirst for righteousness is forever quenched. And by faith, that water will become in her a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Carried away by this lavish flood of grace—

while it gets cut off in today's reading—she gets up and immediately tells everyone she knows that she has found the Messiah, her own personal Savior in Jesus Christ.

So, it was to an adulteress sitting by a well that Jesus came in broad daylight. And it's to you, sitting by a baptismal font—a well of sorts—that Jesus comes this day. Like Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a symbol of God finding His bride, the Church. While most would be scared away if they knew what He knows about you, that doesn't stop your Lord from finding you. He comes anyway—searching for you—seeking you out. Not to judge your sins, but to save you from them. When He climbs the cross and pours out His life, that's for you too.

The font of Baptism is the well of Christ's side—it's where the living water that poured out of Him now pours over you. That list of sins Jesus could've stood up here and read—it's soaked and soggy. The ink's all runny—nobody can read it now. Your past is washed away—you are now cleansed for a fresh start. If you've been thirsting for righteousness, you never have to go thirsty again. Instead, inside of you, Christ has put a spring of living water that is welling up to eternal life.

Your life—right here, right now—it's just like the Gospel story today. Only, don't let it end here where it does today—don't let the rest of the reading get cut off in your life story. No, after receiving such living water, the Samaritan woman runs and tells everyone. So, after experiencing the same lavish grace of Jesus Christ, how could you not also run and tell all your friends? Point them back to where they can get this water. *Look, come—you can say—I've found the Messiah!* In the coming weeks, I can't wait to meet who you bring with you.