

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska.
Message from Rev. Israel Portilla-Gómez, Associate Rector.
March 8, 2026. Third Sunday in Lent.

Scripture readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O lord, my strength and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)



Christ and the Samaritan Woman, by Siemiradzki, Henryk, 1890. Lviv, Ukraine.

In summer, a turtle was walking down a street in Downtown when he was mugged by a gang of snails. A police detective arrived to investigate and asked the turtle to explain what happened. The turtle looked at the detective with a confused look on his face and replied, "I don't know, it all happened so fast."

The turtle in today's Gospel represents the disciples. The text tells us: They were astonished that Jesus was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

If you wonder why they were astonished, it is due to all the prejudices that excluded women. The disciples were in shock and remained silent as they processed Jesus' unexpected behavior.

Everything happened so quickly that, while the disciples went to look for food, Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman shattered certain religious and social beliefs about gender, race, and moral behavior.

Let's look at each one:

Gender: The perception of women in ancient Israel was generally negative. In rabbinic writings, there was a well-known prayer that said: "Thank you, O Lord, that I am not a dog, a child, or a woman."¹ The masculinity of

¹ Nortjé, S. J. (1986). The role of women in the fourth gospel. *Neotestamentica*, 20, 21–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049067>

the time oppressed women by considering them inferior. A woman's testimony was not as valid as a man's. Even when women left their houses, they had to cover their heads so as not to attract attention. They were not allowed to speak to any man, not even their own husbands, and they had to walk a few steps behind men. In relation to public worship, they could not take part in any leadership. Essentially, the role of women was reduced to serving men, and the ideal wife was known for her domestic duties and taking care of her husband's welfare².

Race: The Samaritans were considered impure, and although they were of Jewish descent, they had mixed with Assyrian foreigners after the Assyrians invaded Samaria in 722 BCE. Therefore, they were considered inferior and also heretics because they did not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem but on Mount Gerizim.

Moral behavior: From a moral perspective, the Samaritan woman was sinful. Her behavior was transgressive and shameful, which is why she came to draw water at noon when it was the hottest time of day. Nobody else wanted to go there at noon because of the sweltering heat. She had already had five husbands, and her current one was not her husband either. He was probably a lover, and this was already frowned upon. In Jewish and Greco-Roman culture, women were praised for their domestic virtues, chastity, modesty, and marital fidelity. Women were expected to maintain their purity and arrive at marriage as virgins. This Samaritan woman seemed to lack what it meant to be a worthy woman according to the religious and cultural system.

We could conclude that this woman suffered three misfortunes: being a woman, being a Samaritan, and being a public sinner.

But Jesus, the Son of God, had a different perspective. The narrative from the Gospel of John is one of the most powerful scenes for changing prejudices about people. Jesus intentionally chose to pass through Samaria and waited there while the disciples went to get food. He took the initiative to speak with her, showing himself vulnerable and thirsty. Jesus lowers himself to a level where he inspires her trust in him; he asks her for help because she has the tools to extract water. Jesus gives her a useful role, even though she was probably used to being ignored or criticized. The conversation continues, and we can certainly assume that they spoke more than what is recorded in the Gospel; what is written is probably due to her testimony. The central point is that she believed in the Messiah. "The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming.(...) When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

Interestingly, the following is the only instance recorded in the Gospels in which Jesus reveals himself directly as the Messiah to a single person in a private conversation, without being asked. "Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

After that revelation, maybe in an emotional outburst of elation, the Samaritan woman left her water jar and went to the city, stepping out of the shame that had kept her hidden, to tell everyone about the Messiah. She brought many from the city to know Jesus, and he stayed there for two days. Multiple generations had dreamed of meeting him. Jesus deliberately chose the most unvalued, despised, and belittled person to reveal to her the greatest mystery that the people of Israel longed for centuries to know. For God, this woman's worth does not depend on the judgment and prejudices of other people. She is valuable, accepted, and loved because she is a beloved child of God, just like we all are.

Dear siblings, the message is clear. As Jesus' followers, we are invited to defend and respect the dignity of every human being. Therefore, when we stand in favor of any socially vulnerable, rejected, and/or persecuted communities, such as immigrants, the LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous Peoples, we do it not because we want to be cool, liberal, or woke, but because Jesus taught us to do it as the core purpose of the love of God for all of us. Let's continue in that direction. Amen.

² Asikainen, S. (2018). Women out of Place: The Women Who Challenged Jesus. *Neotestamentica*, 52(1), 179–194.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26499217>