

Scene 3 : What the clearing of the temple means for the Samaritans (John 4:1-42)



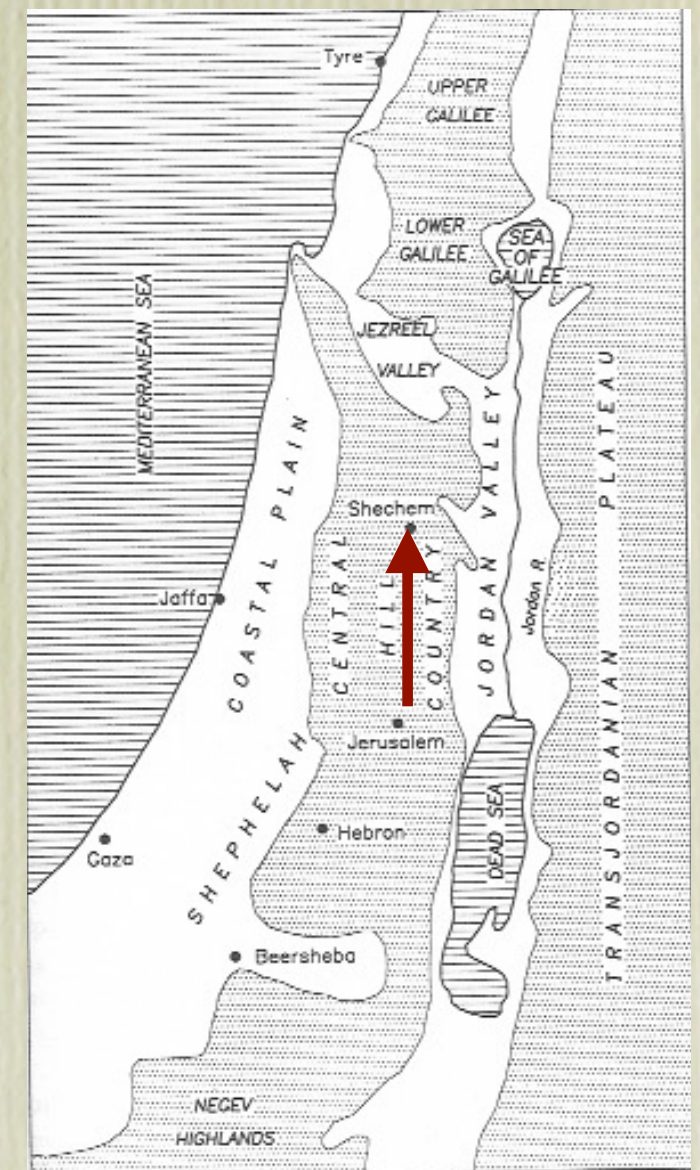
Mosaic by Fr Marko Rupnik SJ Lady of the Southern Cross Church,
Springfield Lakes, Brisbane, Personal Photo.

John 4:1-3

Now when Jesus learned that the **Pharisees** (see 1:24) heard, “Jesus is making and baptising more disciples than John”, although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptised, he left Judea and started back to Galilee.

John 4:4-6

He had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan village called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. (Joshua 24:32). Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.



John 4:7-9

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

‘Jesus is thirsting for the faith of this woman. He is thirsting for the faith of all those for whom he has poured out his blood.’

(Augustine 83 Quaestiones, 64).



Jesus Teaches a Samaritan Woman, The Life of Jesus Christ Bible Videos, ChurchofJesuschrist.org

Jesus has already told a leading Jew that God’s Spirit is not bound within the confines of Judaism: ‘The wind blows where it chooses’ (3:8), and that eternal life is offered to ‘whoever believes’ (3:15). We are watching the Word of God who enlightens ‘all people’ (1:4,9). Jesus breaks across all religious and social prejudices. His words tell us of God’s longing to draw everyone into the intimacy of divine communion.

When the Assyrians conquered Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, in 721BC, they deported many of its inhabitants and colonised Samaria and the northern kingdom generally with peoples from other subject races. Five races are mentioned (2Kings 17:24) – a detail that may be behind the mention later of ‘**five husbands**’ (4:18). In the eyes of the Jews it meant that the Samaritans had lost their racial and religious purity

While the Jews insisted that all who were faithful to the Lord had to worship in Jerusalem, those in the conquered north, who saw themselves as the true descendants of Israel, continued to hold to the validity of their traditions. They had some respite from the oppressive interference of the kings of Judah when Judah collapsed in 598BC, and they resisted the restoration of Jerusalem when the exiles returned from Babylon c.520BC (see Ezra chapter 4). In the second century BC the Samaritans sided with Syria against the Jews and in 128BC the Jewish high priest had the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim destroyed.

John 4:10-12

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”

The Samaritan woman understands Jesus to be speaking of ‘running’ water, the kind that keeps bubbling up fresh from a spring, the kind of water that God has guaranteed by his gift of Jacob’s well. Jesus, however, is speaking of ‘living’ water, ‘life-giving’ water, a ‘spring of water gushing up to eternal life’ (see 3:15). She has come to the well to quench her physical thirst. If only she knew the gift of God, if only she knew Jesus (see 3:16), she would know that she has come to one who can quench a deeper thirst, the thirst of her soul for God.

We recall the words of Psalm 42,1-2: 'As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

Psalm 36:8-9 reads: You give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life.'

We hear also the invitation of Isaiah: 'All you who thirst, come to the waters' (Isaiah 55:1). As well we hear his promise: 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation' (Isaiah 12:3).

John 4:13-14

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.

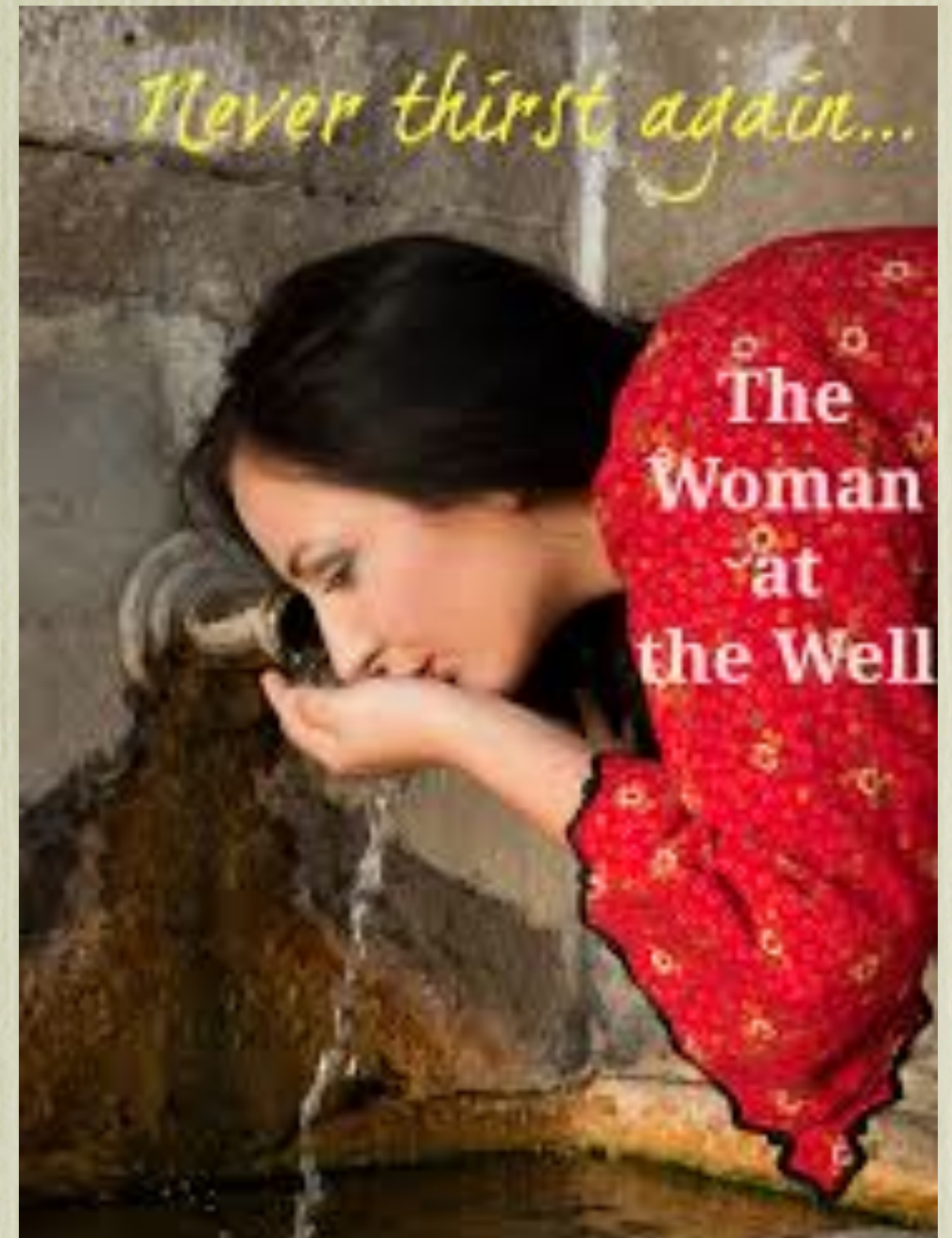
Those who drink the water that Jesus is offering will have no need to search elsewhere to slake their thirst. ‘To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life’ (Revelation 21:6).

John 4:14-15

The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

The water that Jesus is offering is the love pouring out from his heart, from the wells of salvation, quenching our thirst for God and cleansing us from all that hinders divine communion. It is the Holy Spirit (1:33; 3:5) given ‘without measure’ (3:34).

Later we will hear Jesus say: ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of your heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).



The woman's words show that she is not aware of the depth of what Jesus is offering her. Her misunderstanding reinforces for us the need to move to a more profound understanding if we are to come to know who Jesus really is and the divine gift of the revelation being offered to us through him.



The Water of Life Sculpture, Chester Cathedral

The Samaritan woman becomes a symbol for all the Samaritan people whom Jesus is inviting to come to him, so that through believing in him they may find life (20:31).

John 4:16-21

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands (2 Kings 17:24), and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”

The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

John 4:22-24

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Because of the Father’s love the time has come when Abraham is to be truly the ‘father of many nations’. All the tribes of the earth will now bless themselves by him (Genesis 12:3). Jesus is bringing God’s covenant to its fulfilment, offering the water of life to everyone who thirsts for it. All that is required is that we open our hearts to the Spirit that binds Jesus to his Father, the one whom Jesus will call ‘the Spirit of truth’ (14:17; 15:26). True worship is that which rises to God from those who share Jesus’ Spirit and who call God ‘Father’.

John 4:25-26

The woman said to him, “I know that **Messiah** (Μεσσίας, 1:41) is coming, who is called Christ (χριστός). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am (ἐγώ εἰμι), the one who is speaking to you.”

The Samaritans, of course, rejected the idea of a Davidic Messiah, but they did look forward to the coming of the Messianic prophet promised by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). They spoke of him as the Ta'eb, ‘the one who is coming’. Jesus resists being identified with the Jewish Messiah, but he is at home with the prophetic Messiah of the Samaritans. Jesus assures the woman: ‘**I am he, the one who is speaking to you.**’

John 4:26

“I am (ἐγώ εἰμι), the one who is speaking to you.”

In Exodus 3:14 [LXX] ἐγώ εἰμι is linked with YHWH whom Moses encountered in the burning bush, the Redeemer God who commissioned Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. When referring to Jesus, John will use ἐγώ εἰμι as a constant refrain throughout the Gospel.

John 4:27-30

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the **Messiah** (χριστός), can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

In the absence of the woman the jar remains as a symbol of her thirst, but also of the fact that she now thirsts for the gift of God which Jesus is offering to her and to her people. Echoing Jesus' words to his first disciples (1:39), she invites the inhabitants of the city to come and see Jesus. His words have made her wonder if perhaps he might be the Ta'eb.

John 4:31-34

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

Another example of John’s style. The disciples misunderstand Jesus - which enables Jesus to take us to the deep explanation of why he ‘**has food that you do not know about.**’ What nourishes Jesus is the intimate communion he has with God and the call to share this communion with everyone. Obedience to his Father is an essential element of Jesus’ faithfulness: ‘I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me’ (5:30). ‘I have come from God, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me’(6:38).

John 4:35-38

Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you. See how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving his reward and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

The harvest is the reapers' reward. The harvest is the eternal life which is God's gift through Jesus. John is reminding his community which is composed of Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles to rejoice in the harvest but to take no pride in the reaping. As Paul reminds us: 'this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18).

John 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."

They know Jesus because they have heard for themselves. They know that 'truly, he is the Saviour of the world'. These words addressed to the woman are addressed to us who are watching the drama unfold as it were in the theatre at Ephesus. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God sent the Son into the world in order that the world might be saved through him' (3:16-17).

Scene 4 : What the clearing of the temple means for the Gentiles

John 4:43-45

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee. Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet's own country (Judea? contrast Mark 6:4).

When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Jesus is standing on stage, alone. The narrator tells us that at the end of the two days (the days spent at Shechem, 4:40) Jesus set out for Galilee. We are then reminded of a saying of Jesus about a prophet not being honoured in his own country (compare Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24). For John Jesus' own country is Judea. Jesus is welcomed in Galilee.

John 4:46

Then he came again to **Cana** in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a **royal official** whose son lay ill in **Capharnaum**.

John draws here on a story from the tradition - a story found also in Luke 7:1-10 and Matthew 8:5-13. It is not found in Mark. It is instructive to compare these accounts, for it highlights the different ways in which the Gospel writers present their material.

Both Luke and Matthew place the encounter in Capharnaum. John locates this scene in Cana for he wants us to see Jesus' action as an illustration of the new covenant, of the unbounded love of God the bridegroom giving life to those he loves.

In both Luke and Matthew the man is a **centurion** and it is his **slave** who is seriously ill. Let us read Luke's account.

Luke 7:1-6 (Matthew 8:5-7)

Jesus entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.”



Ettore Masina, Jesus of Nazareth, Libreria Borgo, Rome

Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him:

In Matthew's account it is the centurion himself who appeals directly to Jesus

Luke 7:7-10 (Matthew 8:8-13)

“Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

Matthew adds: ‘I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.’

When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

John 4:46-54

Then he came again to **Cana** in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a **royal official** whose son lay ill in **Capharnaum** (see Luke 7:1-10). When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, “Unless you (plural) see **signs and wonders** you will not believe.” The official said to Jesus, “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.”

John 4:46-54

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” The father realised that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

In all three accounts the focus is on faith, and faith in a Gentile. John is making the point that the man believes, not because he has heard of signs and wonders, but because of Jesus' word. As we saw in regard to Jesus' mother in the first Cana scene (2:5), it is faith in Jesus' word, wherever such faith is found, that opens the way for Jesus' life-giving action.



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