

Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

“A Known Tart and the Unknown Food”

John 4. 5-42

1.27.13

So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; ⁶ and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." ¹¹ She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?" ¹² "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." ¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." ¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." ²⁷ At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" ³⁰ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. ³⁵ "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. ³⁶ "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who may rejoice together. ³⁷ "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor." ³⁹ From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed

there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of His word; ⁴² and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world"

This is a very famous encounter between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well. We're including it in this PRESENT SERIES on the theme of food in the Gospels because the conversation revolves around the themes of thirst and hunger and food and drink...AND in this encounter, Jesus Christ also speaks of some kind of hidden food that He eats and ...it's a food we desperately need to discover because if we DO...it can change the way we approach our daily routines.

The issue addressed here, using the symbols of hunger and thirst and this unknown food is the whole idea of FULFILLMENT. Are we fulfilled in our daily work? Are we productive? Are we tired? Do YOU have a sense that you are HELPFUL to others ...do people find you to be a refreshing person?

It's really a great opportunity to question ourselves (and maybe even to ask the people around us) and discover, "Am I a refreshing person to be around? And are the people with whom I live and work encouraged and replenished by being with me... or am I sort of exhausted...and exhaustING?"

This passage is about weariness...and getting replenished. It introduces a way of life that's characterized by being refreshed and also being refreshing to other people, *becoming an invigorating stream of encouragement* to the people around you.

Let's look at this conversation: #1 The occasion and theme #2 The flow and progression and #3 The results and follow-up (lessons for our own lives).

Recently I heard a speech by Os Guinness (he's an Oxford educated social critic and writer) and he was addressing the problem of what he calls, "Fast Life". He says it sort of started with the advent of clocks...then we started to wear the clock on our wrist (what one poet called "the sinister god". Charles Baudelaire)

Things are moving very quickly in our modern world. People in the past were basically oriented TO the past because that's what they knew. NOW, we hear about things as soon as they happen (in the whole world) – there's no lag-time; we're completely informed of developments in China and Syria and Mali...right as they're happening. NOW! (24 hour news cycle.)

And we're always being told about trends that will affect us in the future...So now, our generation, for the first time in human history, we're burdened with Past, Present and Future all at once....And text-messaging and smart phones (the god on our wrist is now coming near our head!). And the breakdown of the barriers between the private and the public...work and home. Speed of travel. And all of this can be VERY psychologically tiring. The tyranny of the urgent has

become exponentially MORE tyrannical...And for these and many, many other reasons...you may feel exhausted.

And, we talk about “infectious laughter” – sometimes there’s also a kind of infectious weariness. The people around us can feel, “Uh, oh! Here comes ‘the cooler’...this conversation is going to leave me depleted with snarky remarks...and little digs and discouragements...this *wearied* person always leaves me feeling...depleted...and exhausted.”

This story (John 4) begins with tiredness: “Jesus, being wearied from His journey”.

And being fully human (as well as fully divine) He sits by a well at noon. They’re, in Samaria – and this is like hostile territory – the Jews consider the Samaritans to be heretics and half-breeds...a long history of enmity and suspicion (they avoid each other at any cost!)... The disciples go into town to buy some FOOD (that’s our theme)...and up comes this Samaritan woman. She’s not coming when other women come...*maybe because she avoids other women*...and maybe other women avoid her.

Jesus Christ is thirsty and He has to become dependent on...the enemy if He wants to drink. He has to humble Himself and ask a favor. It’d be like being in feud with your neighbor and having to borrow a tool. Awkward.

The woman feels the awkwardness...She says, “What’s up with that?” (v.9) And she’s a woman and social convention forbade that kind of interaction.

But Jesus Christ seems oblivious to social convention and in fact we’ll see a lot more of His “obliviousness” in the next few weeks. “If you knew the gift of God and who was asking you, ‘give Me a drink’, you would be asking Me...and I would give you flowing water...living water...”

So, this is the occasion for the interchange (the set up) – weariness from a journey...a search for food...a woman (perhaps an ostracized woman... but certainly, Jesus Christ should know better than to converse with a Samaritan woman!)

And the food and water and the weariness become a bridge to something deeper. They are portals from the known to the unknown, the universal, superficial, everyday human needs for rest and water and food – these become the first steps in a progress from shallow to deep...known to unknown, physical to spiritual.

“I can give water”, says Jesus Christ, “that not only satisfies thirst...but makes the person who drinks it into a source of satisfaction and refreshment for others” – v.14 “the water I give will become a well of water springing up to eternal life”.

The woman says, “Give me this water! So I won’t get thirsty nor have to come all this way to draw!”

Then Jesus says, "Go get your husband and come back!" and she says, "I don't have a husband."

And Jesus says, "I know...you've had five husbands and the man you live with now, is NOT your husband" (this may be why she comes when no other women are there...she's a known tart...women may not want to be around her...may not trust her!)

And now (v.19), she makes a discovery, "I perceive (a big word for John!) that You are a prophet!"

And now she figures to get some insider information from Him because it's not everyday you meet a prophet!

"Hey, could you settle a controversy for me? Where are we supposed to worship, here on our mountain in Samaria or on Your Jewish mountain in Jerusalem?"

And Jesus Christ answers her...always taking the conversation deeper and deeper, "Look, I'm sure this is an interesting question for you (where to worship) and you could wow your friends at the next Samaritan cocktail party... But there are bigger questions you should be asking. This is a moment of destiny...*the hour has come*, the invitation is going out! How about your own heart? Are you a true worshiper? Is God's Spirit in you, stirring you to worship and do you know the true God?

"Well...I...uh...I know a few things..." (I picture her eyes getting really wide at this point as something really big is dawning on her!)... "I know that the Messiah is coming and He will reveal all things to us"... And then Jesus Christ confirms, outright, what she's starting to perceive, "I am" says Jesus!

And just then the disciples arrive and they are amazed...that He would be talking to a Samaritan woman (they don't even know that she's a known tart!) but they keep quiet...and the woman takes off! She leaves her water pot right there...turns out a thirst deeper than physical thirst is being met...and it's already springing up in her, just like Jesus said it would. And she runs for town to tell people.

And what does she tell them? What has convinced her that this is indeed the Messiah? "Come, see a man who really KNOWS me...He told me all the things that I have done...He revealed to me that all the men in the world...3 marriages, 4 marriages, 5, 6...500...no man can really satisfy the deepest thirst in my life!" She tells the whole village, "Great news! I just met a man who knows all about my moral failings and still humbled Himself to speak with me"

In other words, she exposes her flaws to everyone. She is humble because she just met the Humble Messiah who knew all about her and loved her any way! And it empowered her to be totally open about all her failings!

And when the townspeople see this side of the woman...where she may have been easily dismissed up to this point...NOW they take her very seriously! This is something NEW...this is really refreshing!

And the whole town comes out to see, "who is this Humble Messiah...who knows all about us and loves us anyway?" Meanwhile, the disciples are saying, "Teacher, eat!" and Jesus says, "I just ate....I have food you don't know about." "Where is it Lord?" (sounds like Nicodemus! "How can I go again into my mother's womb?") "Where is it Lord?"

"My food", says Jesus Christ, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me and accomplish His work."

Jesus Christ is saying, "You guys really don't KNOW about this kind of food...because you really don't know about this kind of obedience....You obey out of fear and obligation...I obey because it's My great delight and it nourishes Me...it sustains and invigorates and refreshes Me...It's as natural for Me to obey as it is for you to eat!"

Later Jesus Christ will pray at the Last Supper, "Father, I finished the work You gave Me to do." He obeyed like no other human being ever obeyed. He was hungry to obey...not simply because He had to or out of fear. He obeys NOT like a slave but like a son. His obligations and His joys were the same.

And even when His obligations included His enduring an infinite terror, even when He was called BY His Father to become odious in the sight of the Father, even when He would made the symbol of everything that's wrong with ME...when MY SIN WAS CHARGED TO HIM... Facing that moment He prayed, "Not My will but Thine be done."

Even when to obey would require Him to be depleted and to say from the cross, "I thirst" – He was exhausted and dried up so I could be revitalized and sustained and refreshed.

And it's that obedience that is credited to ME, a perfect and flawlessly motivated obedience. The mission Jesus Christ came to fulfill is to live a spotless life of love so that my nakedness and shame could be covered – just like that woman at the well.

Because of that spotless life of joyful obedience, the Father sees me (and everyone who believes) as if WE were THAT obedient. My shame and guilt was put on Jesus Christ and His beauty is attributed to me! That IS the Good News of the Gospel.

The story ends, the results of this whole encounter between a woman in shame and the Man who obeyed for her and who loved her to death is harvest. The living water sprung up in her soul and a whole town is refreshed and brought to life. Jesus Christ says, "Look! Here comes the fields ripe for harvest" and they look up and see the whole town coming to drink living water.

From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have* done." ...And many were saying, "We know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (vv. 39, 42)

How did this woman, tired, thirsty, world-weary, victimized... and unsatisfied ...how did she become NOT ONLY refreshed but also refreshING...so refreshing that she brought a whole town to life? Well, what she got...was simply an encounter with Jesus Christ. "If you only knew the gift of God and who you were talking to", said Jesus. And that's what He gave her. He brought her to see: "I perceive", she said...perceives Him to be a prophet and then sees Him as the Messiah.

He humbled Himself and put Himself at her mercy, as it were, and asks her for help. Then later, He calls her to follow suit, as if to say, "now, your turn...I humbled Myself...now YOU HUMBLE YOURSELF ...let's talk about your lifestyle." And she doesn't lash out with, "how dare you!" She apparently feels like He can be trusted and that HE has the gift of God to give her.

The sinless, perfect Man...the God-Man...lowered Himself. That display of humility refreshes/invigorates her to get open and honest. She repents and believes and in that way, she is both refreshed and becomes a source of refreshment for others, "a well of water springing up to eternal life."

In the end, her obedience actually begins to look like Jesus Christ's obedience...It becomes like food for her...in fact it becomes more important than water! She leaves her water pot and runs to tell people. And it says (v.39) it was because of what He knew about "what she had done" – that's what moved the town. It took courage to say that and she found that refreshing courage in Jesus Christ.

There's more here; such a great emphasis on time and space. How unimportant people were VERY important to Jesus Christ. He was not sending text messages...He was not in a rush to move on to more efficient and profitable stuff. And Jesus Christ, as a real Man, knew the limits of his human nature and rested...got weary...sat down. There's something for us to learn there – we think our multi-tasking and burning the candle at both ends is so necessary because we're so important...it's a delusion. Rest and Sabbath are needed!

But in the end...it all comes down to this: "if only you knew the gift of God and who it is who speaks to you" ...We can become self-forgetful sources of refreshment to others only to the degree that we know the One who obeyed perfectly, who died sacrificially, who rose victoriously and who pours His Spirit into our tired, discouraged and often discouraging hearts.

To the extent we come to repent and know Him...to that extent our obedience will become like His...our obligations will become our passion and our delight. Our obedience will become as natural and as sustaining as eating.