



Dear Folks,

Today, Jesus meets a woman at a well.

Brant Pitre's excellent book "Jesus the Bridegroom" talks about gathering all the people of God to be the bride of the Lamb. The Bible has a couple of powerful images of meeting a bride at a well (Isaac, through a servant, with Rebekah in Genesis 24, Jacob with Rachel in Genesis 29, and Moses with Zipporah in Exodus 2:16:21). Pitre will point out various details in common between these stories and the story of Jesus at the well, which means that a Jewish audience who knew their Torah would instantly make the connection. A man meeting a woman at a well made them think of marriage.

Jesus talks about being the source of living water. We will see again that He will talk about living water in chapter 7 during the feast of tabernacles (the feast of booths): "On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed 'Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says; "Rivers of living water will flow from within him."' He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:37-39)." According to Gail Yee's "Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John" she talks about the last and greatest day of the feast. "On the seventh day, the priests pass through the Water Gate and encircle the sacred altar seven times with the waters drawn from the pool of Siloam (p.79)." There would be other rituals with water during the feast. It would happen at the time of harvest, which was the beginning of the rainy season (there is no rain in Israel during the summer: rain happens in the winter, so imagine cisterns getting dry). In that context Jesus makes His declaration.

Pitre argues that when Jesus tells the woman at the well about living water, He refers to baptism, seeing how it follows from so much about baptism in Chapter 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4. Baptism gives the Holy Spirit (John 1:32 and 3:5) and the Spirit reminds us of the truth (John 14:26)

Jesus breaks down barriers between people. Jesus is about bringing people together. This woman was a Samaritan, and very much an outsider. We don't know the details of this woman's story. She has had five husbands and was living a sinful lifestyle with a man with whom she was not married. Was she in her situation because she made some really bad choices, or because she was treated horribly and this was the only way she could find to survive, or maybe a combination of the two? The fact that she is coming to the well at midday suggests other women were shunning her. In Israel, you run errands early in the morning before it gets hot, and at mid-day you work inside. Jesus loves people regardless of their sins, but also takes their sins seriously (nowadays people assume it has to be one or the other). He doesn't explore the state of her soul, but the basic facts of her situation. The fact that He knew that and didn't treat her with contempt was probably a new experience for her. He did not berate her, simply told the truth, and she knew what the score was. Nowadays, it has the extra complication that many people, including many practicing Catholics, believe that many sins are not only not sins, but positive goods, and that calling them sins is actually hateful. Still, we are called to lead with love and respect, to trust the power of the Spirit given to us in baptism, and to point to the truth. Jesus offers a