



March 3, 2024

Third Sunday of Lent (Cycle A)

"Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?" John 4:29



Dear Friends;

National Geographic had an interesting piece on the "Book of Hours (prayerbook)" of Anne Boleyn. Anne was the second wife of Henry VIII of England. She replaced the popular Queen Catherine of Aragon. Catherine bore six children, only one lived, Mary. Henry was anxious to have a male heir. (Somehow Medieval/Renaissance males could not conceive of the idea that a woman could lead.)

Ever the narcissistic philanderer Henry is drawn to the young, intelligent, and beautiful Anne. Henry wanted a male heir. So, to marry Anne, Henry severed ties with the Pope and the Church and declared himself Head of the Church in England. After bearing a daughter (Elizabeth), Anne lost Henry's favor. Anne Boleyn is often portrayed as the manipulative seductress but this may be the result of Henry's propaganda. She was arrested on questionable charges of adultery and incest. Anne was executed in 1536.

Her memory was wiped from the Court of Henry. Her prized prayer book was missing for centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century the book was discovered. Scholars found notes written by Anne in the margins. They reveal she was not only smart, but also was a pious woman. She penned a short poem, *"Remember me when you do pray, that hope doth lead from day to day, Anne Boleyn."* Ironically after six wives, the only heirs to succeed Henry were his daughters Mary and Elizabeth.

Our gospel story tells of Jesus with a Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar. This story is unique to the Gospel of John. In this story social scientists would call what John is doing a cultural innovation. In a male dominated world the author is confirming new roles for women in his community.

Jesus not only talks with a Samaritan woman he carefully moves her in steps from ignorance to enlightenment, from misunderstanding to clearer understanding. And Jesus does this by accepting her as she is. He does not judge her. The woman appears at the well at the wrong time of the day for a woman. And she is unescorted which means that she has been shunned by the other women for her shameless behavior. Yet Jesus loves her.

In this culture unescorted women and men do not engage in conversation. Yet Jesus willingly crosses that boundary. The woman even brazenly discusses 'masculine' political-religious topics like 'Messiah' and 'Temple.' And Jesus doesn't try to steer her back to 'feminine' concerns. Jesus' respect for the woman helps her move to deeper insights into Jesus. She moves from *"male and Jew"* to *"sir"* to *"prophet"* to *"Messiah"* and after proclaiming him to the village they all proclaim him *"Savior of the world."* All of this was made possible because Jesus mercifully accepts the woman for who she was.

Christ takes us all as we are in our human complexities—men and women. Through baptism God takes us as we are and points us in the way of merciful love. Like the Samaritan woman, he sends us to proclaim the reconciling love of God. God does not call us to be anything other than what we are. He enables us to be the best version of ourselves.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church