My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our Lenten minds, hearts, Spirits and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

That was a whooooole lot of scripture we just heard there. There’s a lot in this story, isn’t there? What is the point of reading all of this text? What is the point of this story? (take all answers).

The old common lectionary, that with which many of you grew up with, proposes only reading to verse 26, with verses 27-42 optional. Catholic and Episcopal lectionaries say read through verse 38. But the reason why we read all of that text today was specifically to include verses 39-42. Right at the end: those verses are the point of the story, belief in Jesus by those who are cast aside, politically, culturally, socially, and religiously. The Samaritans believe, at this early point in Jesus ministry, when all others are still wrapped in darkness, including his own disciples. But how did we come to that point?

Let’s go back to the water again. Yes, AGAIN.

I hope you’re understanding how important bread and water is not only to human physical need, but also how key its metaphor is to understanding our spiritual needs. And all of this water talk this week happens at a very special place, Jacob’s well, where he gave his land to Joseph. And it’s also important to note that this happens in what Jews at that time considered hostile territory, in Samaria. The ones who allowed Alexander the Great to build them a temple on Mount Gerizim that was greater than the one Ezra had built in Jerusalem after leading the Jews back from Babylon.

And let’s remember, Jacob is the one who inherit’s Isaac’s blessing that the Hebrews are God’s chosen people. He steals Esau’s blessing for a bowl of stew, and from then on we hear mostly about the Jacob branch of the family. Jacob’s resume is in order here: he’s a hero of the faith, blessed by Isaac, father of the Jewish nation, and the well that is here has never run dry. And at this place comes a person with three labels of a minority in Jesus’ day: a woman who is a Samaritan and labeled a polygamist.

The contrast could not be greater between these two persons: one of them is the Son of God how has God’s favor; one of them is ostracized in her own town, social circles and probably her own family. And so Jesus engages, and the conversation becomes about the water. Living water literally means water that is running, like in a creek; so the woman naturally doesn’t understand on a level that Jesus suggests. The well doesn’t run like a river.

But the contrast is clear; Jacob’s well is at a fixed location, and Jesus by his presence and travels demonstrates that God cannot be contained to a single holy place. Jacob’s well offers water here, and only to certain persons who are allowed to drink of it. But Jesus comes and says that water is available so that none may thirst again. Now, Jacob’s well is water that is replenished when needed, and it takes some effort to get it because it’s a deep well after all. Jesus’ water never dries up, runs out, or stops being fresh.

The only effort comes about in understanding that living water comes first and most often to those who do not have barriers to God’s presence and teachings. Jesus doesn’t get involved in the crazy back and forth history or geography with the Samaritans. But he also doesn’t approach folks randomly either. Jesus chooses people who will be in the realm of transcending their circumstances, and become symbols of sacramental living (outward signs of inward faith = sacrament), repenting and believing, and then testifying and witnessing.

Jesus names this new truth by explicitly stating God is spirit. And that Spirit has become loosed in the world first by the presence and teaching of Jesus, and later by his death and resurrection wherein he breathes it out on the disciples for the world to share. So it’s entirely consistent that John’s Gospel again makes the explicit statement early on that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and in Samaritan religion the Restorer (or the Ta’eb).

The simple act of Jesus engaging a stranger crossing racial, gender, and religious boundaries should give us pause in our lives. What does Jesus give over and over again in our faith and in our hearts? (take all answers).

Here, Jesus gives acceptance, forgiveness, and new life. He crosses boundaries, more than just geography, to help others understand God’s grace. He heals the past and specifically this unnamed woman’s past, by accepting the humblest person and symbol available.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Black history and heritage month came and went with the calendar, it’s in February each year. Many of us put it on the shelf and have moved on with our lives. But the story of the Samaritan woman reminds us that we have among us, culturally, societally, economically, religiously, folks that are so different from us we don’t associate with them. We pick our friends, our churches, and our relationships to reflect our preferences and worldviews. And life goes on.

Very few of us will ever pick up the challenge of entering into the lives of another person who lives very differently than we do. A person whose genealogy starts not with immigration from Europe, but one whose story begins with enslavement and deprivation of everything, including human rights. The story of African Americans is the story of the Samaritan: in God’s sight, but denied by all who surround them, denied their equality, equanimity, and dignity.

It's too bad that the story of the Samaritan woman never makes it into the February Calendar being the 3rd Sunday of Lent, because it fits like a glove.

But the question for our hearts remains: Have we moved on with our lives until next February, or do we even know the Samaria in our lives and who lives there? I encourage you to think about that, and write down someone who is a Samaritan in your world and do what Jesus did. Offer acceptance, forgiveness, and new life.

Thanks be to God, Amen.