

**Sermon on John 4, 5-30 (HIW 15. August 2010)**

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Dear congregation!

I selected for this sermon a story taken from the gospel of John, chapter 4. The story takes place in a small samaritan village. I hope you can imagine such a village: small houses, dusty paths, thorn bushes, a fig tree. The sun is shining. It is very hot. Therefore everybody is inside the houses, hiding from the heat. Everybody, except for two people. A man and a woman, who are approaching from different directions to the well. Both of them are thirsty. The man arrives first at the well. He sits on the edge and waits. Shortly after him the woman reaches the well. She takes the pitcher from the head and watches him furtively, thinking: "A foreigner. A Jew. Dirty. He must have been a while

on the road. What is he doing here? He looks at me, how impudent!" The man opens his mouth and says, "Give me a drink of water!"

With these words, Jesus opens up a long conversation. The longest, God had with a woman in the bible. A discussion about Jews and Samaritans, about the woman and Jesus himself - ambiguous in some places and impudent. Because a man speaks to a woman with doubtful reputation. Impudent that a Jew talks to a Samaritan woman. And even worse: he asks her for a drink, which would make him unclean.

This meeting between Jesus and the samaritan woman is fateful for both of them. Let me read to you part of the conversation:

*"I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said.  
"My Samaritan ancestors worshipped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the*

*place where we should worship God.” Jesus said to her: “Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship, but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God’s Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is.” The woman said to him: “I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus answered, “I am he, I who am talking with you.”*

The conversation at the well is a nice inter-religious dialogue. Both parties do not only exchange

opinions, like: “What do you believe? What do I believe?” No, Jesus and the woman talk from the bottom of their hearts, they have a profound discussion and go beyond the question of “who is right” – the Samaritans who worship on mount Garizim or the Jews who worship at the temple of Jerusalem. For the first time Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah. And he reveals it not to his disciples but to a woman, a foreigner with different faith. The amazing thing is: The woman immediately trusts him.

Talking to Jesus is a wonderful experience for her. For the first time she meets a man, who does not exploit her, who does not look down on her but who is friendly, who loves her in a certain way. That is totally new for her: As she had been married for five times, people disdain her. It’s so bad, that the woman goes to the well at noon, when it’s hot and

nobody else would be there. Now, Jesus comes and talks lengthly to her. Suddenly everything is different: The woman gets excited, she runs to her neighbours, her people and tells them: “Come, I have met the Messiah!” Astonishingly people believe her. They come to the well. They see Jesus and confirm: “Yes, this really is the Saviour of the world.” And the woman is beaming with joy. Suddenly she is important and respected, because she had met Jesus first.

At the well Jesus overcomes the boundaries of his people, of social and religious conventions. He even overcomes his own prejudices. Yes, I think, Jesus had to deal with prejudices himself. Because he says: *You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship, but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes.* Thanks to the Spirit of God he changes his mind.

That fits well to his message: *the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants.* That is new. People were so used to it that God has a firm place in the temple, and that there is only one place where the service is allowed. To this persuasion Jesus puts an end. A new era has begun. The era of the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wants to.

Nowadays it is normal to us that we can celebrate a service everywhere. But the worship of God in spirit and truth goes far beyond the question of the proper place for worship. To worship God in spirit and truth is a question of everyday's life. Every day we have to ask ourselves: what is God's will? How do we honour him?

Just imagine you to the city centre to buy something and meet by chance some recipients of Hartz IV,

who are walking slowly down the streets, talking, smoking. What do you think? “These are lazy people. They don’t want to work, they want to be paid for doing nothing.” This may be true or not. The question for me is: what would be good and right according to God's spirit and his truth? To be careful with prejudices? To overcome oneself and to address other people when the situation is suitable? Perhaps it is good to trust that each person is capable of something and has something to give. Just as Jesus did when he asked the woman to give him water and started this long conversation at the well.

There is of course a risk: If you overcome your own prejudices you can fall on your nose and pick up stupid sayings or laughter. However, someone who is willing to meet strangers, to talk to them, can quite unexpectedly meet God. For God's spirit

blows where he wants to. We Christians don’t have a monopoly on the Spirit of God. What is God's will and how we live truly, we can also learn from a Muslim in Africa or of Jewish writings from ancient times.

In the Babylonian Talmud the learned Rabbanan of Javne says: “I am a creature of God. And my neighbour is a creature of God aswell. My work is in the city, and his on the field. I get up early to do my work, he does the same. I don’t fulfill my duties better than he his. You might think that I do a good job and his work is insignificant. But we have learned that it makes no difference whether what you do, is big or small, when only you think of God and stick to his word.”

I think: This attitude of respecting other people and of overcoming prejudices could be a worship of God in Spirit and truth.

May God give us the courage to try this again and again. And may he bless us with good experiences.

Amen