

There is Something in the Water

3rd Sunday in Lent; Series A

John 4:5-26

In the book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis of his *Chronicles of Narnia* series there is a character by the name of Eustace Clarence Scrubb. He was a boy that many believe became quite literally whom he spent the majority of his boyhood practicing to be. He became a dragon.

In the book Eustace is portrayed at first as arrogant, whiny, and self-centered. In fact, at the beginning of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, his cousins dislike visiting him and his parents mostly because of Eustace's arrogant and unfriendly attitude. As the book continues with the main characters in the land of Narnia, Eustace wanders off by himself when the ship puts ashore on an unexplored island. Growing tired he falls asleep on a dragon's hoard of gold and precious treasures. When he awakes he finds himself transformed into a dragon by "greedy, dragonish thoughts" in his heart.

After living his life as a dragon for a while, eventually, Eustace meets the lion, Aslan, the Christ figure of the whole *Chronicles of Narnia* Series. In his encounter with Aslan the lion returns dragon-Eustace to human form by peeling off his dragon skin and sending him into a refreshing bath. Through an encounter with Christ and the waters of a well, a dragon is slain and a new, transformed boy emerges.

I bring up this scene from C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* because it is a wonderful parallel to the woman's encounter with Jesus at the waters of a well in our Gospel reading. C.S. Lewis's scene helps us better understand what is happening in our Gospel reading.

We will stop short of comparing this woman at the well with a dragon, but it is true that she has a fiery past full of limitations, disappointments, failures, and sins. Through her encounter with Jesus her beliefs about God and her life of immoral missteps are revealed. First, we learn that she can only see her life in terms of her lineage, her ancestor's' link to Jacob, Joseph, and the blessed well (Jn 4:11-12). She can only see her devotion to God in terms of a particular dear holy place, Mount Gerizim (Jn 4:20). She is basing her relationship with God on being born into the right family and worshiping at the right place. A living faith and trust in the one true God is missing. Second, we see that her lack of faith and trust in the one true God is shown through her unrepentant immoral actions that are at odds with God's Will.

Like Eustace's "un-dragoning" in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, through this woman's encounter with Christ and the living waters she is transformed. Through the means of the water Jesus offers her eternal life and the gift of the Spirit so that she may have faith in the one true God, worship him in Spirit and truth through a godly, repentant lifestyle and truly receive salvation (Jn 4:14, 21-24).

You and I have a past we would rather not disclose, don't we. Even now we struggle with pet sins that we would like to keep in the dark even from our closest relatives. In our worst moments some may compare our behavior to that of a

fiery dragon. Sometimes others are unable to see past our limitations, disappointments, failures, and sins. In our most vulnerable moments we are unable to see past them.

But your limitations, disappointments, failures, sins, spiritual struggles, and fiery past no longer defines you. And it is my hope that none of you ever let those things define you. It is my hope that you don't let others bring up your past, your sins, your struggles, and your shortcomings as an attempt to lead you to forget who you are or as an attempt to redefine you and your identity. It is my hope that we continually remind our children, grandchildren, and the children of our congregation that their limitations, disappointments, failures, sins, and spiritual struggles do not have to define who they are.

You have encountered the Christ at the waters of a well we call a baptismal font. You and everything you ever said or did or thought is exposed only to be forgiven. All your limitations, disappointments, failures, and sins are crucified with Christ and drowned in the waters of your Baptism. You have risen to new life. Dragon scales and a fiery past no longer get to define who you are. You were bought with the price of your God's own sacrificial offering. You are now his own. Now you have the privilege of living as his baptized child. Now you have the privilege of honoring God with your words, through your speech, with your actions, and in your thoughts. Now in all these ways you have the opportunity to worship him in Spirit and truth through the gift of his Spirit that lives in you.

Like that encounter with Jesus at the waters of a well was a defining moment for that woman's life, so also your encounter with Christ and the Spirit of God through your Baptism was and is still a defining moment. Before her encounter the Samaritan woman could only see life in terms of her lineage, her ancestors' link to Jacob, Joseph, and the blessed well. After she saw her life in terms of a more lasting lineage, namely, her relationship with God through Jesus, who is greater than Jacob, and her fellowship with those who put their trust in this Messiah. Before she could only see her devotion to God in terms of a particular holy place, Mount Gerizim. After she saw her devotion to God in terms of faith in Jesus, God's "truth" (cf. 14:6-7), which amounts to worshipping him "in the Spirit" (cf. 14:15-17). We as readers and hearers are invited to see the Samaritan woman's life as one of limitations, disappointments, failures, and sins before her encounter with Jesus at the waters of a well. After we are invited to see the work of God in the life of someone who in many ways shares our struggles of faith in God and our struggles to honor him and his Will. We are invited to celebrate the new life in Christ and the extension of that life through the woman's bold witness to others.

"The Cure had begun" (120). This is how the narrator describes Eustace's "un-dragoning" in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The narrator says, "He was becoming a different boy even though he had relapses and there were still many days that he could be very tiresome" (pp. 119-120).

You and I have been crucified with Christ. Our old self has died and the new self has risen from the dead. The old Adam is drowned and a new self has been washed, reborn and emerges from the waters—cured. But there will be relapses. The desires of the flesh will wage battle against the desires of the Spirit that are at work in you through the Holy Spirit in which you dwell. This is why as Christians we live as the baptized children of God by being people of repentance. This is what remember especially in the season of Lent. It is a penitential season focused on repentance. This means we are also confession and absolution people. We are forgiveness people. As Jesus has us pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." You now have the power of Christ and his Spirit at work within you to live a transformed life in repentant love, forgiveness, and service all your days.

In our Gospel reading the woman shared her encounter with Christ at the waters and many believed because of her testimony and were brought to Christ to hear and see for themselves (4:29; 4:39-42). Now you, like that woman at the well, can say, "Come, see the one whom I told everything I ever did and he forgave me and washed me clean." And by the grace of God perhaps some that you encounter will also encounter Christ at the waters. Perhaps they will respond as the people responded to the woman in our reading, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (Jn 4:42). Amen.