

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

March 8, 2026

Exodus 17: 1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; Saint John 4:5-42

In nomine Jesu!

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well - and with us - Jesus deals with one of those "little deaths" I mentioned on the First Sunday in Lent, two weeks ago. It appears to be so little and so common that we use it regularly on ourselves and wield it frequently against others. Yet when it is communalized and institutionalized, it is as deadly as war itself. Just ask any one the marginalized people you know. The "little death" Jesus deals with is shame, or shaming. The way Jesus deals with it, and the lesson the Church has tried to convey by assigning this in Lent, is straightforward and simple: Shame and shaming have no place among the baptized people of God.

This is not the first time in John's Gospel or in Lent that Jesus and we are encountering the deadly reality of shame. We saw it last Sunday as Nicodemus came surreptitiously to Jesus by night - to avoid detection, protect his reputation, avoid being shamed for his dubious associations.

The Samaritan woman is using the same tactic in reverse. She comes to the well at the hottest time of the day to avoid being shamed by her neighbors who are, wisely, staying indoors during the heat of the day.

In case you missed it in this story, Jesus' disciples are afraid of being shamed too; shamed by association with Jesus who's not only conversing with a woman, but a woman of dubious reputation at that. Worse, she's a Samaritan, which in that time were considered worse than even Gentiles. After all, while Samaritans worshiped the same God and used the same basic Scriptures - the Torah - as they did; the Samaritans worshiped in the wrong way, with the wrong priests, in the wrong place, avoiding Jerusalem's Temple and ignoring the psalms, prophetic books, and other writings the Jewish community revered. They were heretics - worse even than their hated Roman oppressors!

Simply by speaking to this woman, Jesus begins to deliver her from shame.

By acknowledging, without judgment, the reason she is being shamed “you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband,” Jesus begins the process of putting her shame – the shame she inflicts on herself; the shame others inflict on her constantly – behind her. We call that forgiveness; and because all this happens at a well and in the conversational context of “living waters,” Christ’s Church has always proclaimed this as a baptismal event, applicable to her then and us today.

Look at what happens to her! Rather than treating her reputation as shame, she uses it – “He told me everything I have ever done.” as an essential element of her testimony, her proclamation which, according to John, resulted in “many Samaritans from that city believe[ing] in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony.” Her “old story” coupled with her “new life,” is central to what our life as the baptized people of God is all about! That’s what Paul means when he writes “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

There is a cost for this kind of living; but Paul also reminds us of its benefits too: “we ... boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope **does not put us to shame**, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” That’s what that woman did. That’s what we are also called to do. And let’s face it, hope, and reasons for hope, is the greatest need in our world today; and if we have it, we must share it. As we eat and drink Christ’s body and blood together, God gives us the Holy Spirit and courage to do just that.

There’s one more thing that needs to be said about shame, and shaming, and about those who have been delivered from it and are now making this a part of their faith formation, faith journey, story. We all know exactly who I mean and for what we have shamed them. Some tire of hearing their story; of Christ’s Church, and this assembly encouraging them to tell their story and to rejoice in their deliverance, and to boldly and clearly make public our repentance for how the Church has shamed them, and how Christ’s Church now invites, welcomes, and receives the gifts God has given them through the previous afflictions they have endured. Whenever you feel that way, remember the Samaritan woman’s story and its life-changing effect on those who boast “we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”