

What do you remember about 1996? This was the year when, Bill Clinton beat out presidential opponents, Bob Dole and Ross Perot. The Yankee's defeated the Braves in the World Series—let us not speak of it. Musicians Tupac Shukur and Ella Fitzgerald died.<sup>1</sup> 1996 was also the year, *The Notebook*, by Nicholas Sparks was published.

Since I can't see you, you don't have to be embarrassed when I ask you to raise your hand if you read the book or saw the movie. The plot of the *Notebook* - a boy and girl from different social circles, who seem mismatched but fall in love - is similar to that of other famous love stories, like *Lizzie Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy* - *I do love Pride and Prejudice*. It is similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. In any good love story, there is something to overcome or an aspect of rejoining what was somewhere in the past, lost.

I've never thought about this woman at the well and Jesus as a love story though. Have you? For far too long the only aspect of love that we have focused on in this story is to figure why this woman had 5 husbands; why was she at the well at noon instead of early morning; why was she talking to a man and a Jewish man at that. This is no love story, ...unless you can suspend previous held notions of this story. This Samaritan is the first woman preacher in the New Testament! Based on her witness the town's people are eager to meet this stranger by the well and see if he could be the Messiah. John is doing something here that I had never considered; he's telling a love story.

This motif of boy and girl meeting at a well is one common in the Jewish scriptures. Typically, the motif goes like this:

1. Bridegroom or servant travels to foreign land. (check)
2. There he meets a girl at the well. (check)
3. Someone draws water from the well. (check)
4. The girl rushes home with news of the stranger. (check)
5. A marriage is arranged, and the bridegroom is invited to stay.<sup>2</sup> (check)

The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah happens at a well. The love story of Jacob and Rachel begins at the well. Moses helps the daughters of Reuel at a well and is given Zipporah in marriage. Anyone listening to John's gospel story of Jesus coming to the well would have assumed that he would meet a woman. What has already told you how Jews and Samaritans felt about each other, so when Jesus, traveling through Samaria, follows this motif and meets a woman at the well, can it really end in a marriage?

---

<sup>1</sup> Some information gathered from <https://www.infoplease.com/year/1996>

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Scott Miller, <http://logosmadeflesh.com/2012/06/26/the-thing-that-happens-when-men-meet-women-by-wells/>

There is much history and brokenness to overcome in this meeting. But with this story, we find a kind of love that is only possible with the Messiah; the one who was sent in love into the world to save it. A love that, as Whit said, breaks down barriers. And in a beautiful undertone we find that motif emerge, that whether it is Jews and Samaritans or Capulets and Montagues, or Bennets and Darcys, we see that in this love story, two families are brought back together.

Jewish, New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine writes, “Had Jesus and the woman failed to have a conversation, the connection to the convention [of meeting at the well] would have similarly failed and the allusion to the conventions anticipated end, namely the joining of two families would have been lost.”<sup>3</sup>

John is telling an unlikely love story. But a love story that promises God so loved the whole world, that he brings together all of our feuding families and all our fears and made up-hatred of each other, all our prejudices and all our preconceived notions; God so loved the world that he brings together all the love in heaven and all the love on earth in the best love story, the Word made flesh, his only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

### **Prayers of the People**

Living God, in our hour of need we turn again to you... to whom else can we turn... have mercy on us and on this world, you created and continue to rule over with sovereign love. Have mercy on us, O God. We put our faith in science and reason... we put our faith in men and women who are experts in their fields... we put our faith in our elected and appointed leaders. And yet, we place our ultimate faith in you, even our very lives we place in your hands... because you are our God, and you have proved your faithfulness time and again. Though we have strayed from you, you have never let us go... and so we reaffirm our love for you. We thank you that you are not distant from us, but have drawn near, in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. He has shared our life; fragile and uncertain as it is... he has tasted our suffering and our death, and he has defeated it. He understands our worries and our fears; and not only ours, but the worries and fear of each person in our world. Help us, God, as this pandemic spreads across our world, we ask you to help us, God.

This morning we pray for those who have already lost loved ones... and for those seriously ill right now. We uphold the CDC, other agencies, and all of their staff as they respond to this added pressure on their already overstretched capacities. We pray for doctors and nurses and all who work to help and support people as best they can. We remember those working behind the scenes- testing samples, confirming results, giving information to patients. We uphold those who are working around the clock in labs trying to understand this virus better and working to create an effective remedy. We pray for our governments and leaders – national, state, and local – as they work with the best medical advice to guide us on how we should respond and what action we should take... and we pray that these guidelines might be taken seriously by all and that all would put them into action, even those who are skeptical. As the virus continues to spread, we pray for the disruption it causes to normal life, bringing new fears and anxieties.

---

<sup>3</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (HarperCollins, New York, NY 2006) pg. 138

We pray for all who are facing financial hardship – individuals and businesses – we pray for the economic impact this pandemic has had and will continue to have; throughout the world and here in Hickory. We pray for ourselves and our loved ones who are dependent on pensions and retirement accounts. We pray for those who have already been laid off and for those whose future livelihood is threatened by events cancelled or postponed. We pray for those whose trips, both for business and pleasure, have been canceled; and others whose events like weddings and anniversary celebrations, long anticipated and planned for, have been postponed. We pray for parents with children; especially those with young children... we pray for those making contingency plans for working remotely... and for those not able to work remotely and are scrambling to find good childcare for their children. And we pray for our children who will miss school... miss their friends and teachers... miss learning new things... and those who will miss meals and other essential services because they miss school. And finally, we remember those who cannot visit loved ones in assisted living or nursing homes; and for our elderly friends whose human contact has been severely curtailed. Help us to find creative ways of keeping in touch, of assuring them they are not forgotten or ignored, and of meeting whatever needs they may have in this difficult time.

May congregations find new ways of living though this time. May we not forget our faith but draw upon it for guidance and strength. And may this crisis bring out the best in us – living by faith and not by fear... and so be a witness to you, God of grace and God of mercy. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, the Christ, who taught his followers to pray:  
Our Father...