

The Only Thing You Need (Jh 4:5-30, 39-42)

* Dear Friends, beginning with Ash Wednesday we've entered into the penitential season of Lent, the time of lamenting and fasting. By the way, there are many other activities we are engaged in due to our occupation or responsibilities. So, last week I drove around 40 miles to attend the Learning Community class organized by our District President. The theme of the day was specifically assigned to fasting. As we discussed the different ideas and restrictions on the matter of fasting, we found ourselves more theoreticians than practitioners at lunchtime, otherwise we would be Catholics or Orthodox. Unlike the Christians who abstain from certain foods, Lutherans recognize food-centered- fasting as adiaphorous; in other words, it is just the matter of a personal decision. The point here is that Christians may not abstain from meat or cheese during the Lent, rather they should stay away from judging and prejudices. It would be wonderful that while fasting the Christians may be changed from good to better. However, without God's judgment there would be no lament and Fasting on earth.

* While some Christians doubt to believe and be prepared for such kind of misfortunes, there are still many who have taken God's words seriously. As usual during the Lent, the true worshipers make haste to meet the Lord Jesus in church each Sunday and even at each midweek service. Here in the church they may receive a wonderful sense of peace and spiritual joy partaking in the life-given mysteries. Moreover, on hearing the Word of God, particularly the gospel lessons, God's people may have experienced the transformation into a beautiful image of a man preaching on the Mountain, (Mat 5:1-11). Significantly, as it can be seen from our text (Joh 4:5-30) the Samaritan woman demonstrated her spiritual renovation as she had believed in Jesus and was transformed into a "well" flowing with the "Living Water."

* In our attempt to see the gospel lesson as a "part of a whole," we found that the second, third, and fourth chapters of John's Gospel speak clearly on the matter of the miraculous transformations. They are the changing of water into wine; the changing of the physical temple into the human temple; the changing of "one who has been born of water and the Spirit;" and further, the changing of the old preoccupations regarding a place and nature of worship as well as human beliefs and their hearts. On hearing what had happened with the Samaritan woman and her countrymen, we've received the strong confirmation – that Jesus Christ is a cause and effect of an eternal and glorious life to all who believe in him as the Messiah, "I who speak to you am he" (v.26), said Jesus.

* The well-known idea of the physical transformation is embedded and developed in fiction, especially as this subject is very popular among fairy tellers. In connection with the idea of transformation, we want to recall to you the famous fairytale of Hans Christian Andersen's, *The Ugly Duckling*. Here is a shortened paraphrase of the story.

* Once upon a time there was a mother duck sitting on a nest with six eggs. Among those eggs one was distinguished by its imposing size. One day the eggs started cracking. Soon all of them hatched, except the biggest.

The mother duck had to sit on the big egg throughout the next day and night until it hatched and out came a big ugly duckling. It did not look like the rest of her babies. The animals in the barnyard made fun of the big ugly duckling. One of the other ducks even bit the poor baby on the neck! His brothers and sisters made fun of him too, so he ran away. He found a pond with lots of grass to stay in until hunters and their dogs scared him away. The ugly duckling finally found a house where a woman, a cat and a hen lived. He spent the night in the house but, because he couldn't purr or lay eggs, they made fun of him. The ugly duckling grew restless, so he went into the wild world, and for a certain time he had remained alone over there. But one day he was able to stretch his wings out in the sun and flew to a remote pond. There were beautiful swans at the pond, and they came over to greet him.

When he looked into the water, he saw himself, and he had become a swan like them. He was the best swan ever!

* Friends, this fairytale may be taken as a starting point for further discussion regarding a community where common characteristics or interests are shared. The story likes to say that one who had been disapproved within a certain community finally was transformed into something remarkable and superior. Next, this fairytale bridges with the conception of a spiritual transformation. If you noticed, Andersen's fantasy caught the idea of an instant transformation that comes along with sound doctrine. In proper time, when the ugly duckling had glanced into the glittering water, he saw a beautiful swan looking back at him. We are too once we're changed from spiritual ugliness into a spiritual beauty by means of the living water of our Baptism and the Spirit. Once, being transformed, we continually carry this new beautiful image under the veil of our perishable bodies. But at the Last Day, "Behold! ... we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." (1Co 15:51.52) In that moment the veiled beauties will be unveiled and we will transfigure into the physical likeness of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ.

* Now, let us get even more insights from this fairytale. Does it seem that domestic birds remind us of the Pharisees and the ugly duckling Samaritans? The answer should be "Yes!" The Bible and traditions speak that Jews treated Samaritans even worse than Romans; they were considered ritually unclean. For instance, a Jew who would use a drinking vessel after a Samaritan would become ceremonially unclean. No doubt, the Jews would banish any Samaritan from their villages not to mention their synagogues. Much more, the Samaritan woman was rejected both by Jews and her own countrymen because of her sexual behavior. It says that she had five husbands and the man she had at the current time was neither her husband nor even her bridegroom,(v.18). From the discourse, it is clear, Jesus did not judge the woman, instead, he offered her the "Living Water." That grace broke down the dam of her gender, race, shame, and, it broke down the dam of that day's social prejudices. And as Jesus tore down all these barriers, the "Living Water" began to flow between God and the repented heart.

* One thing more, the suitable reflection on *The Ugly Duckling* as an example of how a person's life should be conducted within a Christian community is found in Galatians. Here Paul wrote, *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love,"* The apostle himself can serve us as a living image of love among brothers, (1Co 4:16). *Look at me and do the same,* he said. Paul teaches us to love each other; he or any apostle had never taught us to hurt, or supervise, or offend to anyone in the Christian community. Now, imagine yourself a shepherd who notes a sheep biting another one. What action will be taken with the biter? From (Ezek 34:22) we have an answer, the Lord himself will judge. *"I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep."*

* Now, for a good purpose, we look for something in common between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman as far as both were called to faith in Jesus according to the 3rd and 4th chapters of John's gospels. The similarities in these two are few, while the contrasts are numerous. It seems that Nicodemus has more advantages where it concerns the knowledge of Scripture, religion background, observing Mosaic laws and leadership. Contrasting Nicodemus, we know that the woman had a primitive knowledge of Scripture, a bad reputation, and she played an insignificant role in her society.

* However, some additional distinctions begin to speak loudly on behalf of that woman after a certain event. Nicodemus was not converted immediately, while the woman's faith witnesses that she was. The conversation with Nicodemus had no impact on the lives of other Jews, but the woman brought back nearly the whole town with her testimony; (v.39-42). We know that Nicodemus was told in hidden terms regarding Jesus' deity, (2:18-22); but the woman was blessed to know that the One who spoke to her was the Messiah. At this moment, we stop contrasting these characters as soon as we've noticed the beauties flowing over the ugly cover.

* However, at least one thing was shared in common among all mentioned people., that those people didn't despise to drink the "Living Water" offered for free. In (Jh 7:37) Jesus stood up and cried out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."* Now the Christ as a Well of Living Water continues to transform human beliefs, feelings and the entire course of human life where his people gather in church. A thirst-quenching Spring of Love, Acceptance; Forgiveness, and Mercy produce the wonderful transformation like it was with the woman at the well and her countrymen. Those people began to fill themselves with the "Living Water," and it's *The Only Thing You Need* in order to fulfill all requirements of the Lent season.

Beloved in the Lord, let the grace of God flows through us in our gathering to the church today and in eternity.

Amen