

“Rabbi, eat.” they said to Jesus. “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” he replied.

I like that line. I like it a lot! It says something about Jesus. There’s a sense of satisfaction in him. He’s happy, he’s fulfilled, he’s, in a proper sense, proud of himself. You know how it feels when you’ve done something good? You’ve given a gift to somebody and they genuinely like it, you’ve said something that obviously lifted somebody’s spirits on a bad day, you’ve helped people grow or learn in some way?

When I was teaching I would feel that way sometimes on final exam day. In Physics class, say, I’d look out over the class silently working on the test and think about how they had come in at the beginning of the year with all the usual misconceptions people have about the land of Physics – words like velocity, force, energy all used interchangeably. I knew they were different now, more precise in their thinking, more informed about the ways of the physical world. It felt good to know I had helped them learn. Jesus shared in that kind of feeling. It was his “food” he said, what kept him going, what nourished his spirit.

The immediate cause of his sense of satisfaction was the encounter he had with this Samaritan woman. He had been tired from his journey and was sitting by the well. He was thirsty but he didn’t have a bucket to get any water from the well. His disciples were off getting provisions so he would just have to wait.

She came to the well around noon to get water. She had a bucket. However, as you may have heard before, nobody comes to the well around noon to get water. It’s too hot! She was probably coming then to avoid the other women and their wagging tongues. Meanwhile, he was a Jew and she a Samaritan woman. Cultural norms at the time were that he shouldn’t even talk to her. None of that stopped Jesus: “Give me a drink.” he said.

Well, you just heard the story. You know that she didn’t understand him at first, suspicious perhaps, but she responded to his acceptance of her. Responded, also, to his challenges: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.”

But, what affected her most of all was that he knew the biggest thing that kept her down, made her feel like a failure, what kept her apart, what the wagging tongues were probably wagging about: “You are right in saying ‘I do not have a husband.’ for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband.” He knew. Yet, there he was talking to her, treating her with respect.

She went away a changed woman! She had come to the well at noon to avoid the others but now she was not only willing to talk to the other people of the town but to admit to them that she was a sinful person – that’s the sense I get from “He told me everything I did.” And she cared about them enough to want to get them to meet him too. In her life there was a ‘before Jesus’ and an ‘after Jesus’ and ‘after Jesus’ was a whole lot better!

And he could see the wonderful transformation that had taken place in her and he felt good about it! It was the will of the one who sent him. He was sent to sinners who were keeping their distance to help them become friends and he had done it! He was energized, he was uplifted, he was nourished by that fact!

And there's more. "My food," he says, "is to do the will of the one who sent me . . . and to finish his work."

[He is, for instance, going about finishing that work in the Catechumens here today. You are not yet baptized, but you have come to him asking for that living water. He knows everything you've done and . . . he's probably been telling you about some of it – to approach Baptism at your age is to admit to being a sinner. But he accepts you, respects you, takes you as you are and wants to make you even more of a friend. And he wants that for all of us!]

[He wants to finish his work in us!] Even those of us who are baptized and already washed with his living water try to keep parts of ourselves away from him. Like the Samaritan woman we do things that do us no good and make us less than what we were meant to be. But the more we get to know him, the more we can overcome our misunderstandings and suspicions and truly 'encounter' him, the more we take him as he is, accepting his love and accepting his challenges, the more we will go away changed, transformed and made more whole.

And that will make him very happy, because that is what he came to do.