

## Passing By: On High Speech and Low Speech, or On Calling, Memory and Presence [John 4: 4–42, Deuteronomy 33: 26–29]

Lise van der Molen

Fellowship of God through our Lord Jesus,

The forty days time has started. Forty years after Pesach! Forty years through the desert. Forty days until Easter! Forty days of reflection until the day of victory over death!

It's recalling Israel and its delivery. And it anticipates both of them, as Jesus does at the beginning of the gospels. At Easter the delivery comes once for all: His Exodus!

It is like an image in the mirror. Comes in Israel the trial after the delivery, with Jesus the trial comes first and the delivery is at the end.

And we? We are going to and fro. In our liturgy we recall our delivery and we go to meet it. And it's in this way that the gospels recount delivery and trial. The first is always unheard of, the second is hard. We're coming from them and we go to meet them. But the trial happens in order to remind us what our delivery is about. In this way we come to the mountains where we get its information and to the fountains where we savour its refreshment.

In this way Jesus made his followers experience once more the history of Israel. This is the way the Gospels bring the news. John does it in a particular way.

Jesus was an extraordinary teller of parables. Our word 'parable' comes from the Greek word 'parabola' which means a section of a cone. Along a curb at the bottom two parallel lines go up. What does it look like? You have to go through the curb to see the parallel. John imitates his master in the most subtle manner. It's this that you're going to see in the story of the Samaritan woman.

The point is that a woman who didn't belong is going to belong, as did Rebecca and Rachel at a fountain... At the fountain where it happens new life occurs! The fountain of Jacob, of which we hear alone here in John's Gospel and in the blessing of Moses at the end of his life.

In this story John tells us that Jesus is referring from the normal water to the living water; from life to eternal life; from normal meal to the table of the heavenly orders; from sowing and reaping to sowing and reaping in the way he does and as the followers will do.

He makes all references beyond the normal origin and goal of that normal way: of that which we call and find normal.

The normal words get their origin and sense in their metaphoric usage. In their metaphorical sense we find the original sense:

We have no use for water without the living water; we have no life without eternal life; to have food is not a real meal without the knowledge of the will of our Sender; we cannot reap

without honouring our predecessors, who sowed; we cannot sow without believing in those who are our descendants.

Jesus does precisely the contrary of what news papers and television do. They try to be in accordance with modern science without understanding: flatten, vulgarize. You call 'water' H<sub>2</sub>O. Of course you cannot ask: can you give me a glass H<sub>2</sub>O? That minimum has a different goal. I'm not against the physicist. He is reducing because he is aiming at something better.

But the journalist doesn't know that and thinks: reducing is the thing, is a definition. Jesus refers to the fullness, the completion.

Or, when you want to hear that, he does precisely the contrary from what the theologian Dr. Harry Kuitert states. He says: "Everything from beyond comes from beneath." Jesus says: "Everything from beneath comes from beyond." All normal things are of no avail to us, when we do not know of a delivery which is far beyond us.

In the story of the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman and also with his own followers you see the same form of reducing and flat understanding: oh, is it only this! When something from beyond is pointed out, the woman wants to have it for normal use: "oh, how lovely, that living water, then I will never more be thirsty!" When Jesus is talking about some different meal, the followers think that someone has offered food to him.

Our hand is of no avail to us, when there is no higher Hand. Our work-days get meaning only on our Holy Days!

Easter has to do with the exaltation and the change of our language. For in that language, the language of the Spirit, we move in the direction of the goal and the roots of our history! Easter has to do with the turnover of the flatness, the flattening, with all oppressing; with the turnover of the normal, with the extraordinary of our delivery, which has its roots in the exodus of Israel.

Two deliveries have formed Israel. The first came when the people were freed from the existence of the tribe. This happened to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No more enslaved by the cult of ancestors conjuring up their ghosts and by blood-feuds, no more enclosed in the small circle of the clan. The twelve tribes are together in the direction of the future: "to be a blessing for all mankind" – such is promised to Abraham and his off-spring.

The second shape came when Israel was freed from the sky-world of Egypt, free from the dominance of the stars and the work-slavery. This happened when Moses came. The new language they learned through him in the desert, at Sinai: the language of the ten words, which are appropriate for marriage and work.

It's a double emancipation. They didn't speak anymore in the tongue of the ancestors and they didn't speak in the dead formulas of the astrologers and priests: they were the first economists!

The women for the first time got their own voice and the work got rhythm. A Sabbath came into being and jubilee-years were held in prospect. They weren't anymore jubilees of the pharaoh's and the emperors, but celebrations of the redistribution of properties in every 50<sup>th</sup> year.

Many centuries went by before in Israel this shape got a shade of coming true. In reality it was never achieved: this kingdom under the law of mercy and righteousness. And in world-history it's even still longer underway, still never achieved.

The pattern of these revolutions Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy discovered in the Western history in the midst of the First World-War, in 1917.

He was of Jewish origin, but from his youth on he had the feeling to be a Christian. As a lieutenant in the German army he served at the front of Verdun. He experienced the downfall of the German Empire. In the midst of that catastrophe he discovered the pattern of Israel's two-fold delivery happening in world-history. He wrote a magisterial book on it: on the European Revolutions from Pope Gregory VII at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century till the World-Revolution happening in two World-Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Every time there comes a new order and it comes together with a journey through the desert. There is every time an interim of lawlessness which lasts 40 years before a new lawful order is established, two generations. At the beginning with that pope and at the end in our own time it is lasting about 70/80 years, more than three generations before its establishment.

Remarkable is in all this that the strange shape of Israel by way of the Church of Jesus Christ has entered the world and has formed in the midst of the second millennium the Christian state - and that Israel itself has stayed outside. What is it?

We come across at the memory of the Shoah or Holocaust and in all sorts of expression of anti-Semitism, enmity against the Jews.

Well, it brings home to us that this driving power of history still isn't at its end. The story goes on!

It remains a strange story. It is the story of the meeting of the Samaritan woman and Jesus. The strangeness and the estranging of people are removed around him. For he is the Messiah, as the woman and fellow villagers discover.

He is the man who does wherefore Israel is in existence. All ancestors-worship is strange to him: he said "before Abraham was I am"! He is it who really observes the Sabbath: the coercion of work and eating and drinking - he is putting them at the second place.

For yes, all is every time again about bread and drinking and money. The Israelites have made this experience in the desert, at Massa and Meriba when there was no food or water. Egypt is popping up every time again with this economy of borders and coercion without a heart.

The Samaritans are in Israel the part of the ten tribes that stayed behind, 6 centuries before Christ, at the Babylonian captivity. They have returned to some form of ancestor worship. They've tried to prevent the rebuilding of the temple, when Israel returned from exile. 600 years later still Jews and Samaritans in the days of Jesus for this reason don't meet each other. But Jesus has that meeting. It happens at "the fountain of Jacob" where the memory of the Samaritans and the future of the blessing of Moses meet. It's on the place where women of strange origin became incorporated, became part of the people of God.

Jesus holds on to the saying: salvation comes from the Jews. But it doesn't depend on the worship on a holy place, even not on the most holy place of the Jews: Jerusalem and its temple. It depends "on worshipping in spirit and in truth."

Jesus is speaking the new language of Israel, the language of the heart. It is the language which makes us aware who we are. As the Samaritan woman experienced: "He told me everything I ever did." He reveals to us who we are: whether we are there for each other and for all human beings! Whether we're on the road to level the barriers between human beings and groups.

This is our ultimate mission, the heaven under which all is subordinate: to swear an oath on the love which overcomes all borders.

Indian Christians have an impressive ritual for this presence of life and for their new life's condition. When being baptized they lay a hand on their head and pledge allegiance saying: "woe to me, when I do not proclaim the gospel!"

Honour to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy, the healing Spirit. Such it will be, such it was and such it is now also!

**Amen.**

### **Deuteronomy 33 : 26 – 29**

26. Nobody, Jeshurun (erect one, or beloved = Israel) is alike the Lord God,  
 who is sailing along the sky in order to help you,  
 in his Highness along the airs.
27. Citadel of protection is the God of the origin,  
 around under you is he, everlasting arms.  
 He dispelled from you the enemy before your face,  
 he said: destroy!
28. In safety settled Israel,  
 on its own is the fountain of Jacob,  
 upon a land of corn and must,  
 also its heaven drops down dew.
29. Happiness, Israel, to you!  
 Who is like you,  
 people delivered by HIM,  
 the shield of your help,  
 him who is the sword of your Highness!  
 Your enemies shrink before you,  
 but you, on their mountaintops you take your way.

Translation of the translation Buber/Rosenzweig.  
 By Lise van der Molen 2014-03-30