The great Italian sculptor, Michelangelo, said, “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.” It is our task to discover our uniqueness, to come face to face with our self. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well shows why this self-discovery is so important, why self-discovery forever changes how we understand and live life. Let’s begin by setting the stage for this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Of course, we know the encounter took place within a patriarchal culture. The Samaritan woman reveres their ancestor Jacob and his twelve sons – no mention of Jacob’s daughter, Dinah. Also important to recognize about the context for this conversation is the rift between the Jews and the Samaritans, which can be traced back to 700 years before Jesus’ birth. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans is inherent in the culture by this time. So, it is surprising that a Jew is speaking with a Samaritan. It is stunning that a Jewish man is initiating a conversation with a Samaritan woman. This violation of societal convention sets the stage for this remarkable conversation.

I love that early in the lesson we are told that the encounter took place about noon…a transition point during the day…a foreshadowing of a change of heart. The conversation begins with Jesus telling the Samaritan woman to get him a drink of water. This demand leads to a discussion about living water, the spring of life known through Jesus Christ. Then, we hear, what at first blush might seem amusing, a discussion about the Samaritan woman and her husbands. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman to go get her husband and come back and she tells
Jesus that she has no husband. Jesus says to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” At first blush, amusing…but, in fact, the moment of transformation. The Samaritan woman acknowledges that this is true. Indeed, she has had many husbands. But, note, this exchange is not about judgment. Jesus is not judging the woman’s morality. Jesus is offering her the opportunity to self-reflect. And, what happens when she does? When she awakens to herself, the light dawns, and she opens herself to the possibility of the Messiah standing right there in front of her. She is so overwhelmed, she leaves the jug of water, goes back to the city and immediately tells everybody about what has just happened. The life of this Samaritan woman is forever changed. She knows she is loved and forgiven and wants everyone to know this to be true: God’s love and mercy is real, life-sustaining, life-giving and for all.

We are called to self-reflection. In this season of Lent, we are urged to discover our uniqueness, to come face to face with our self. We all know it’s not easy to find the quiet time for reflection. I read a great column recently entitled “The Age of Noise” by James Conley, the Catholic Bishop to the Diocese of Lincoln in Nebraska (Friday, February 10, 2017). He writes, “We are, today, awash in information, assaulted, often, with tweets and pundits analyzing the latest crisis in Washington, or difficulty in the Church, or serious social, political, or environmental issue. It can become, for many people, overwhelming….To be sure, we have a responsibility to be aware of the world and its challenges, and to be engaged in the cultural and political affairs of our communities….But we are living at a moment of constant urgencies and crises, the ‘tyranny of the immediate,’ where reactions to the latest news unfold at a breakneck pace, often before much thought, reflection or consideration….The Lord didn’t make us for this kind of noise. He made us for conversation, for exchange and communion….the Lord also made
us for silence. For contemplation. For quietude. And without these things anchoring our lives, and our hearts, the age of noise transforms us, fostering in our hearts reactive and uncharitable intemperance…. We’ll be free from the anxiety and worry of the ‘age of noise’ when times of prayer, and silence, are regular facets of our day. We’ll be, when we quiet the ‘age of noise’ in our hearts, the leaders of wisdom and virtue which our culture desperately needs, right now.”

Conley is telling us how important it is to find that quiet time for reflection. It is a priority for ourselves and for this world. We can make the time.

I’m reading a great book right now entitled *Passion for Pilgrimage* by Alan Jones (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 1999). Jones is an Episcopal priest, retired Dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and a prolific writer. Jones talks about how we all long for home. That longing is God drawing us in to our own uniqueness. We are drawn in because from that place of self-revelation, life begins anew. From the place of self-revelation, we are drawn out into the world, in wonder of God’s love and mercy and with the desire to love and to be in communion with all whom God loves. When we don’t connect with ourselves, we get lost, we might act out in meanness or addictive behavior, because we are repressing memories and feelings. God is always inviting us home. Jones explains, “Your own soul is a vast desert for your homecoming. It is full of holy places of encounter with God” (pg. 38). In these holy places, we recognize that our uniqueness matters, that each one of us has a role to play in this life that no one else can fulfill. Jones says, “As we progress on the pilgrimage, the mystery of human freedom lies in doing what we have to do! We do what we must do, but from a new place inside ourselves that has surrendered to God and to nothing and to no one else. We find that we can do our duty not out of duty but out of love….The deepest of our aches was put there by love. We cannot help being lovers” (pg. 49).
In this season of Lent, we can make finding time for self-reflection a priority in our lives. We can journey inward to the place where we come face-to-face with all that we are: our strengths, our weaknesses, our desires, our motivations, our uniqueness. And, right there, in that moment of self-revelation, we know God and are inspired to live for God. Let’s take the journey and know freedom. Michelangelo said, “I saw an angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” Amen.