

I love the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. I'm not sure when this love affair began with this vignette or the Gospel of John in general. All I know is that one day I read this story and from that point on I couldn't get it out of my head. There is something about it, something about this short conversation and interaction that speaks to me. In fact, I love it so much that the blog I keep is called "The Well is Deep," after this story. The well might be deep, but Jesus' love finds a way to overflow out of it anyway.

Getting back to the story, there's a lot going on here underneath the surface. This encounter between Jesus and this woman is unexpected and, in many ways, scandalous. This woman is coming to the well at midday. This is when the sun is the highest in the sky and so it is unusual...why does she not come in the early morning with everyone else? We are left to assume that she has been ostracized by her community. It's not because she's immoral or adulterous as history has often painted her to be. Jesus passes no judgement on her and there are many explanations as to why she would have had so many husbands. Regardless, her marital status has almost no bearing on what happens between them, save the fact that Jesus knows what it is.

Jesus calls her into conversation, something that should never have happened. A woman should not be talking to man like this and a Samaritan *definitely* shouldn't be talking to a Jew like this. And yet, Jesus doesn't care about any of these artificial boundaries created by society. He wants to talk to *her*. He wants to get to know *her*, regardless of what anyone else might think.

And the result of this budding relationship? An offer of living water. This might be a term we need to unpack a little bit. "Living water" might bring to mind a running, rushing river, or it might be a waterfall, or, as people of faith, we might understand it to be the waters of baptism. The Gospel of John is full of these words and phrases that have a surface meaning, as well as something much deeper. Last week that phrase was "born from above." This week it's "Living water."

"Living water" can call to mind all sorts of things...but what's really important is knowing what living water *does* and what it *means*. Living water means that we will never be thirsty again. It's tempting to respond like this woman and say, "Yes, give me this living water so that I won't have to keep coming to the well or buying Brita filters or paying my water bill!"

Of course, we thirst for this literal water. We need water in our fields to grow our crops. We need water in our aquifers and wells to wash and bathe and cook. We need clean water in our estuaries and rivers and lakes to sustain animal and plant life. How many times a day do we drink water or coffee or tea or some other liquid to satiate our thirst?

But we also thirst for other things, for more than what we physically need; we have thirsts that cannot be quenched by water from a well.

What are these things that leave us dry-mouthed? What is it we thirst for?

We thirst for more than continued campaign slogans and rehearsed talking points when we are faced with enormous issues of justice, peace and equality.

We thirst for more than gloomy forecasts about the decline of established Christian denominations when we are faced with the immediate prospect of being the hands and feet of Christ in our world.

We thirst for more than the empty words of, “It’ll get better in time,” when we are faced with real rifts and chasms in our relationships with those we hold dear.

We thirst for more than platitudes or shallow gestures of comfort when we are faced with deep grief and pain over things we have lost.

We thirst for facts, truth and compromise when we are faced with conflicting reports and insincere remarks.

We thirst for *more*...more than what this world says we should drink. We are desperate. We are longing. We are so, *so* thirsty.

But Jesus promises us living water. Living water that we are washed in through baptism. Living water that grafts us into the body of Christ. God’s living water that quenches this thirst.

When we are presented with fact-checkers, half-truths and spin, we are given the Gospel and the Truth of the Word of God to trust in.

When the future of our tradition looks bleak, according to studies and polls, we witness the Holy Spirit enlivening the Church in new, surprising and varying expressions and reminding us that God is bigger than our organizations.

When it seems as if our strained and broken relationships will never recover, the forgiveness and grace of God for us and others allows a beginning for healing and renewal.

When it seems as if our deep mourning and sorrow for people or things lost will never subside, the light of God seeks us out, finds us in our darkness, and restores us, brings us back to health.

When we are faced with all the things our culture lacks, and all the ways in which our society leaves us parched, we are met by God. God uses this living water, fills us to the brim and quenches our thirst.

And the end result? Let’s look at the Gospel once again.

Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water and she wants to accept. He tells her about her past; he knows what her life has been like. She asserts that she believes the Messiah is coming. Jesus announces that the Messiah is *him*.

All of a sudden their conversation is interrupted as the disciples return, but the woman has heard all she needs to. She runs into the city, abandons her water jar, and tells the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” She proclaims her experience to her community and they respond. The gospel tells us, “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” ...but that’s not all! They had conversations with Jesus and got to know him for themselves and, eventually, they said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves...”

Do you see? Do you realize what living was able to do—what living water *is* able to do? Living water engages us in our community. Living water gives us inspiration and energy to go out and participate in God’s mission. Living water enlivens us with joy. Living water creates and sustains relationships.

Living water, our baptismal gift, changes everything.

Amen.