

GOSPEL

John 4:1-13
Jesus & the Woman at the Well

REFLECTION

"Sir, Give Me This Water!"

As we move into our last few months together with me as your minister, perhaps your mind, like mine, is drawn to other farewells. Life is full of endings and beginnings. I've heard it said that each ending is like a little death, preparing us for our final farewells. So, as I was reflecting on this passage, I got to thinking about the time after my father had passed away, and before his remaining possessions were put out for the red tag sale. I had one last opportunity to go to the home my parents had once shared, and to consider whether there was anything I wanted for myself, or my children.

I wandered through each room of the house, the garage, and even my father's workshop, poking around, looking at the stuff that had surrounded my father in the last years of his earthly life. The most important things, of course, were the "un-things," the intangibles connected to the objects, the rooms, the property-- the memories and life lessons, the hilarity and the grief, and how the two were so often deeply intertwined. and the friendships... all those folks who had come in and out of our lives over those many years.

As I got in my car to head out of town, I decided to stop by at the local coffee shop, the "watering hole" where old the gang still gathered, every morning around 10 and every afternoon around 3. My dad, had been their local United Methodist minister for 12 years, and had returned to that small town in his retirement. He had been part of that coffee shop gang for years. He saw it as part of his ministry to be there with the people, to know them--to be a part of their daily lives. It was there, in that coffee shop that folks would check in with one another, share their days, their accomplishments and frustrations, their laughter and their tears; and of course, on occasion, their wisdom, no-nonsense advice, or the occasional offer of help. The issues of the day were debated, jokes were shared, and foibles brought up for gentle teasing. Laughter would frequently punctuate the air. And there were the occasional silences, which would linger in those moments when nothing but simply being present to one another was adequate to the news that had just been shared.

There are, I suspect, such places in most communities, pubs and coffee houses, community centers and schoolyards, convenience stores and street corners, even churches--places where people gather to share bits of their lives with one another, and leave feeling a little bit lighter and fuller at the same time for having spent some time in one another's company.

The well where Jesus meets the Woman of Samaria is such a place. Wells are often gathering places in the ancient world. I imagine the women taking their jugs, early in the morning, before the heat of the day and collecting the day's water. There at the well, they would check in with one another, talk of the day ahead, and share accomplishments and frustrations, fears and sorrows, and of course, on occasion, wisdom, practical no-nonsense advice, or assistance... and there too would be those silences that occur when words are not enough.

The Woman of Samaria in this morning's gospel story, however, does not go to the well early in the day as the other women do. She is not there as they debate the issues of the day, nor does she share in their jokes or laughter. She does not experience those occasional deep silences that come of shared heartache, compassion and easy companionship.

Instead, the Woman (who is never named) approaches the well at noon when it is empty of the company of women--the very women who might lighten and enrich her day, but who so rarely do.

If she would dare to go early in the day, they she knows they will turn their backs against her. They will hiss their outrage at her very presence. They will shut her out, shame her, shun her. She knows this. So she goes to the well in the heat of the day--alone.

Do we know her? Have we seen her, or someone like her, passing by just lately? Do we even have the eyes to see such a woman?

SUNG RESPONSE

Where do we get that Living Water?

Winona & David E. Poole

GOSPEL

John 4:14-30

REFLECTION 2

Come and See!

The woman carries her jug to the well outside the city gate in the heat of the day, which is more bearable to her than risking the disdain of the women. But, oh how she thirsts for their companionship-- how she longs for company of women. And, more than that, how she yearns to reclaim -- her God-given human dignity, and her own place among the members of her community. She longs to be seen... to be known..to be understood.

The woman's conversation with Jesus is an unlikely one. Jews don't mingle with Samaritans; Jews don't drink from Samaritan buckets. Jewish men do not talk to woman unaccompanied by a male family member. These things are not done. But then, there's Jesus. Imagine her curiosity, trepidation, longing and surprise when, this Jewish stranger looks at her, speaks to her, and asks her for a drink. Imagine, her astonishment... as Jesus lingers, engages her in conversation, and promises her the gift of living waters gushing... unto eternal life. And finally, imagine her stunned relief, as Jesus directly breaks the silence that surrounds her shame, and simply names the tough realities of her life-- without a hint of scorn, ridicule, judgment—or even of pastoral care or concern!

He addresses her as a full partner in this discussion of things eternal and true. The conversation with this unnamed Samaritan woman is the longest conversation that Jesus has with anyone in this gospel. As she settles into his presence she senses those living waters beginning to stir in her depths, and she begins to reflect on matters of faith. They move together into a revelatory conversation about who he is, what he is about, and about God's gift of 'living waters' flowing up into eternal life... into life that is rich and full and overflowing with joy and deep purpose.

Soon, she is off and running. This ostracized, criticized, marginalized woman is sharing her excitement with those neighbours who have been anything but neighbourly to her. This no-name woman, who has been so long scorned, has forgotten her shame. She has left it behind at Jacob's well. Left it sitting with her pot, right there next to Jesus--forgotten it... and, somehow he seems to have lost track of it too. For the first time in a long time, she is brimming—in fact, bubbling over with ...joy. The community echoes with her excitement. The people are so taken with her transformation, her boldness, and her strange story that they cannot help themselves. They run to meet the one who has unleashed in her such an astonishing joy.

Of course, the woman might be any one of us. Any one of us might find ourselves justly or unjustly shamed or ashamed, shunned, or wishing we might simply somehow disappear. Perhaps you know what it is like to enter a room as conversations continue, and backs are turned against your presence; or to stand at a counter and realize that somehow you've become invisible, deemed unworthy of attention or care, or to sit alone in a coffee shop and wonder why we seem so often alone. Worst of all, perhaps, is knowing what it's like to have said or done something that we ourselves judge as unforgivable-- to regard ourselves as unworthy of the easy companionship of others.

Like the woman at the well, we know what emptiness feels like. We know the texture of loneliness—of desolation—of loss.

Perhaps our gospel writer shares this story to remind us that in spite of what we ourselves or anyone else might think of us; in spite of anything we have said or done, or had said or done to us; in spite, even, of our deep belief in our own unworthiness, Jesus sees and knows us, both as we are, and us as we long to be. He embraces us in the fullness of our humanity-- faults, failures, follies, foibles, and all—and, remarkably, regards us as the most worthy of companions.

Is it possible, do you think, that our souls might be stirred, that our lives might brim with those living waters—that we, even we, might be drenched in the goodness and fullness of life and of joy?

SUNG RESPONSE

Where do we get that Living Water?

Winona & David E. Poole

GOSPEL

John 4:31-42

REFLECTION 3

Pointing to the Moon

That last day after leaving my father's home, I arrived at the coffee shop ahead of the rest of the gang. No sign of them anywhere. I thought to myself, "Maybe they gather at 2:00... maybe I've missed them. Should I stay?"

It wasn't that I needed the coffee. It was the companionship I was looking for, it was the light in their faces when they saw me sitting there, the sharing of memories, the laughter, the tears, those sacred coffee shop silences.

I ordered some pie to go with that coffee and sat down. Before long, they began to file through the door... There were smiles of recognition and, "Debbie! Oh, it's **so good** to see you!"

The conversation went down well with the pie, and the coffee hit the spot.

Soon, I hit the road, my car packed with the stuff of memories, and my heart and mind lovingly filled with memories of dad, and the way he had of touching people's lives, their funny bones, and their hearts. I was brimming, and grateful to be his girl.

I wonder if that's the kind of watering hole we aspire to be -- the kind of place filled with people whose eyes light up in welcome, and whose words state clearly, "It's so good to see you! We are so glad you have come. Come on in... sit down. How are you? We'll talk and laugh. We'll share stories, and some of the important bits of our lives. We'll let the spirit of compassion, those living waters, flow rich and free among us. And in the end, God willing, we'll leave, feeling a little bit lighter and a little bit fuller than when we first arrived."

And so we are. And so we do. I'm so glad you are all here. It's so good to see you.