

15 March 2020 , The woman at the well.

John 4:13-19, 25-30.

There was a centuries old feud between the Jews and the Samaritans, but the quickest way from Judea to Galilee lay through Samaria, which is why Jesus was taking that route. Just out of the town of Sychar there stands to this day the well known as Jacob's Well. It was there that Jesus sat down to rest. His disciples had gone ahead to buy some food in the Samaritan town.

As Jesus sat there, a Samaritan woman came to the well. Jesus asked her to give him a drink. She was quite taken aback by his request. 'I am a Samaritan woman,' she said, 'You are a Jew. How is it that you ask me for a drink?' Bottom line, Jews and Samaritans don't mix. However, they engage in an interesting conversation, during which Jesus reveals to her that he is the Messiah. He also talks about how he gives people life, using the analogy of water, which of course, is the reason why they are at the well. It is also revealed that she has had five husbands and is living with, potentially I assume, number six! This itself is very interesting for a reason which I will get back to in a minute.

This story tells us so much about Jesus, probably more than any other story in the Bible. Firstly, it shows us the real humanness of Jesus. Jesus was tired and needed a rest. He was also thirsty. On the one hand, Jesus was super-human, but on the other hand he had feelings and needs just like you and me. We see examples of this very occasionally in the Bible.

One example is the occasion when a man brought his son to Jesus to be healed because the disciples were unable to heal him. Jesus turned to the disciples and said, '*You stubborn, faithless people! How long must I put up with you until you believe? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.*' Matthew 17:17. And of course, he healed him, but what a cry of frustration that was. With all due respect, that was one mighty put-down of the disciples. He was probably a little tired and his frustration showed.

Then there was the cry of anguish from the cross, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' Jesus was hurting in more ways than one. According to John's gospel, he also called out that he was thirsty. So Jesus had his human qualities.

This story also shows us the warmth and kindness of Jesus. Normally, a Samaritan woman would not have conversed with a Jew but this woman obviously felt more than comfortable in Jesus's presence. Look at the way she chatted with him. This was unheard of.

The point is this, this woman was used to being judged because she was a Samaritan, but Jesus was not into judgment. On the contrary, he condemned judgment. '*Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticising others, or it will come back on you.*' Luke 6:37. One of the problems with Christianity is that we are perceived as being very

judgmental, and there are valid reasons for that perception. It actually goes against everything that Jesus stood for and that is very sad.

This story shows us Jesus as the breaker down of barriers. The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans went back a long way. It was small wonder that the Samaritan woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, should speak to her. But then Jesus broke the mould, didn't he?

But there was another way in which Jesus was breaking down barriers. The Samaritan was a woman. The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. For a Rabbi to be seen talking to a woman was the end of his reputation, but this didn't deter Jesus one bit. Not only was she a woman, but she was a woman of doubtful character, because it is revealed that she had five husbands and the man she was living with at the time was not actually her husband!

The other aspect of this story I want to focus on for a minute is Jesus's reference to water. *'Jesus replied, "People soon become thirsty after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life."* John 4:13-14. Water is a very appropriate metaphor for Jesus to use. Water is essential for life – without water any life shrivels up and dies. Water is essential for growth. If you want a plant, a young tree to flourish and grow, you water, water and water. Jesus is making the point that in terms of our spiritual growth, he is like water. A relationship with him is essential for our growth, to the extent that if we don't cultivate that relationship, our spiritual life will die.

I referred to the warmth and kindness of Jesus towards the Samaritan woman. How important is this. That really encapsulates everything that Jesus wants us to be in our attitude to others. The water of kindness and it is interesting that Jesus refers to eternal life. What does he mean by this?

There is the story of a man who went to his office every day in his expensive car, and made important decisions and signed big contracts. One evening, after a hard day making money, he packed his briefcase to go home. As he was locking his desk for the night, he noticed a stale sandwich lying in his drawer. Without thinking, he put it into his pocket. On the way out he passed a beggar on the steps, huddled in an old blanket. 'Here, my friend,' he said to the beggar, 'Here is something for your supper.' And he gave him the stale sandwich.

That night, the man dreamed that he was away on a business trip. After the day's meeting, he was taken with his fellow directors to an up-market restaurant. Everyone gave their orders and settled down with their pre-dinner drinks in anticipation of a wonderful meal.

Soon the orders arrived. There was roast pork, lamb cutlets, salmon – you name it, it was there. Then his own order arrived. A waitress set in front of him a small plate on which sat a stale sandwich.

'What kind of service is this?' the man demanded. 'This isn't what I ordered! I thought this was supposed to be a reputable restaurant.'

'Oh, sir,' the waitress said, 'you have been misinformed. This isn't a restaurant at all. This is heaven. We are only able to serve you what you sent on ahead while you were alive. I'm very sorry, sir, but when we looked under your name, the best we could find to serve you was this little sandwich.'

This isn't actually a story about the after-life. Well it is and it isn't. In our context it is more a story about God's kingdom here on earth. Jesus is the water of life, and by embracing him and living his ideals, we take on a new life, and we experience and enjoy the fruits of that new life – a sense of fulfilment, peace, and worthiness. We have a taste of God's kingdom.

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