

SERMON
By: Gail Fricker

“Are You Thirsty”

August 12, 2018

John 4:5-30

It might be hard for us to really get a picture of this story. I mean, we are just so used to indoor plumbing and turning on the tap! We don't gather around the community well here in Ontario. There's no water pump in the middle of Ayr! But in some countries, wells are the life source of clean water. They are places where community gathers – where there is laughter, sharing of stories, community chit-chat. I was fortunate enough to spend some time living in rural Kenya, so I remember first hand how everyone in the community had to go to the well for water – it was usually in early morning or later in the evening; in the cooler parts of the day. It was a place of community building.

And that is how it is in our scripture. The well would have been a meeting place. But of course, in this story – the woman is found alone at the well. She is there at noon – not in the cooler early morning or evening, but in the heat of the day. That in itself is a big clue that she has been shunned by the community – she is not welcome at the community gathering. She is an outsider. It may be because of her multiple husbands, or possibly because she may have been a prostitute, but either way - she is not a respectable lady in the society's eyes.

And then along comes Jesus, also in the middle of the noon day heat. For all she knew, Jesus is just as unrespectable as she is. And when he actually speaks to her – she thinks for sure that he must be some outcast from the community. After all, culturally men and women who were not married to one another really weren't supposed to talk together in public. It just wasn't accepted. And secondly Jews and Samaritans would never speak to each other –there was an ancient cultural feud between the two groups - it was a cultural faux pas! A 'no no.'

It's a pretty shocking scene – the two of them there at the well, extreme opposites: male and female, Jew and Samaritan, bantering back and forth. And the story of cultural boundaries would have been shocking to the first audiences who heard it! So, why is it included in John's gospel? What is the significance?

The importance is the interchange between them.

It begins with Jesus asking the woman for a drink. Jesus, the Messiah, is willing to admit his thirst to this outcast woman. He ignores all boundaries and he asks her:

“Will you give me a drink?” (v.7)

Even the woman is surprised at the request, and responds:

“How can you ask me for a drink?”

A woman of disrespect? A Samaritan? To which Jesus answers by telling her about “living water”. He says:

“Everyone who drinks this water(at the well) will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.” (v. 13)

It's not surprising that she likes the idea of never having to come back to the well in the mid day heat, and so she says:

“give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” (v.15)

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

Now it isn't clear if the woman really understood what she was asking.

Maybe she was just enticed by the idea of never having to walk all the way to the well again.

But I don't think that is the case, since at the end of the story we're told that she "left her water jar" and ran back into town.

She left without water!

So I don't think that she is thinking about drinking water when she asks "give me this water."

I think that this woman is thirsty for a spiritual experience. She even tells Jesus that she is waiting for the Messiah to come. She is waiting for something spiritual.

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

I think that this woman, with all her faults, is thirsty to be accepted.

She is tired of being the outcast.

She is thirsty for love, and perhaps that is why she has had so many men. But, she wants to be loved for who she is.

She is thirsty for living water.

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

When she came to the well, she was just a woman doing the routine, mundane task of fetching water for her day.

She wasn't searching for an encounter with the Sacred, but that's exactly what she got.

Right there in the midst of her ordinary chores she had a spiritual moment.

She came carrying a water container, but she left AS the container carrying LIVING WATER!

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

Can we identify with the woman in this story?

Do we come to the well, thirsty for something?

Do we long for a Spiritual experience, but can't quite explain what it is?

There is a new trend in our society for "Spiritual but not religious" – SPNR's. People who long for something more, but can't really explain what it is.

In the middle of our ordinary routine days, do we long for a glimpse of something more Sacred?

A spiritual glimpse;

a drop of profound refreshment which reveals a deep well;

an invitation to drink deeply of something that will satisfy our thirst like nothing else can.

The encounter in this story happened beside a deep well, but the reality is that as Christians, we know that Jesus IS the deep well – and you and I, each of us here today, are the woman who has come to drink! We come saying:

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

Today, as we remember our baptism promises, and as we make new promises, we are essentially saying the same as the Samaritan woman said to Jesus. We may not have all the answers, but we know that we want this "Living Water". We want to be loved, accepted, and filled.

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

But, are we really drinking the living water from the deep well?

Are we oozing living water from every pore of our bodies?

Are we glowing with radiating spiritual light, so filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, that others are saying – "I want what you have?"

Because if not, then we'd better get drinking!

The short definition of evangelism is one thirsty person showing another thirsty person where they found water. You can't show someone something you haven't found for yourself.

I believe this is why we come here each week, joining our church family in worship: we come to drink refreshing, rejuvenating, living water from a deep, deep well...SO THAT we can share it with others.

And just like the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, we don't judge, criticize, correct or try to fix others – we just offer them the love and grace of God, through Jesus Christ. Everyone can drink from this well!

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

Today, as we celebrate together in Fayelynn's baptism, we share the living water that we have discovered.

As we continue on our faith journeys that we begin with Baptism, may each of us keep drinking the water from the deep well that quenches our thirst. Jesus promised that it would be a never-ending spring of water – a well that can continually refresh and restore us. And so may each of us, continue to ask:

Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty!

Amen.