

His Well is Deep! John 4:1-14

One of the reasons Jesus was such an effective teacher was His preference for using common ordinary things to illustrate uncommon extra-ordinary spiritual truths. Unlike other religious teachers, Jesus had no need for magic incantations, spells and curses, pointy hats or bubbling cauldrons of strange and exotic ingredients. No eyes of newt, wings of bats, repetitive mantras or carved Buddha. Jesus took things that people were accustomed to seeing or using every day and used them to teach about God, to help overcome unbelief and discover the Truth. Pause for a moment and consider some of them. Lost coins, lost sheep and lost sons. He spoke of pearls and swine, salt and light, yeast and mustard seeds. He used vines and vinedressers, virgins and lamps, barns filled with grain and fig trees that didn't produce figs. Eating His last meal with His disciples he took bread and wine to illustrate a new covenant- a new promise- and because of His death and resurrection He will break bread again with His followers in paradise someday. Jesus used common things in a very uncommon way like no other teacher could.

It was no different that day in Samaria. Jesus used plain ordinary drinking water, something the desert dwellers held precious, to illustrate one of the hardest things for humans to understand- eternity. Let's look at the events leading up to His encounter with this Samaritan woman. Judging by verses 1-3, things were stirred up in Judea. It seems that there may have been some rivalry or competition between the followers of John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples (not Jesus and John!). (3:25-26). Not only that, the Pharisees had gotten wind of the popular appeal of Jesus and they weren't happy either. The time was not right for a confrontation with them, so Jesus and His disciples left Judea and headed north for Galilee.

Jesus led His disciples to an area where they wouldn't be a hindrance to the ministry of John the Baptist. If we aren't careful, we will overlook a lesson here for us modern day disciples of Jesus. We are not in competition with other churches for souls. There are lost people and opportunities for sharing the Gospel everywhere, and if we are to be fruitful, we will need to allow the God to lead us. The Holy Spirit prepares and equips us to share the Gospel and prepares people to receive it.

We see a practical example of that with the Samaritan woman at the well. Verse 4 tells us that Jesus “*needed*” to go through Samaria. Other translations render it “must needs go through Samaria”. There were other paths Jesus could have chosen that day. In fact, Jews usually avoided Samaria at all cost, even if it meant an extra day or two of travel through the hot and dusty desert. The Samaritans and Jews were bitter enemies, much like modern day Jews and Palestinians. They despised each other for a variety of reasons. They had major religious, cultural and political differences and the Jews especially hated the Samaritans for marrying outside of their race. Jews claimed Mt. Zion to be the chosen place to worship the true God while the Samaritans claimed it was Mt. Gerizim. Even so, Jesus *needed* to go through Samaria. It wasn’t because there were orange traffic cones blocking the other road. It appears the reason Jesus needed to go that way was that He needed to meet the woman at the well.

The gospel writer intends to have us discover a great truth- Jesus will go out of His way and seek us out even when we aren’t looking for Him. Methodists call that prevenient grace. For those of us who have unconverted friends or loved ones that is good news. Can you almost hear the disciples’ reaction when they come to the fork in the road and Jesus told them they would be traveling through Samaria? Do you wonder if some may have even refused to go and turned back? Are there times when we are tempted to do something similar? Are there times when we want to do ministry, but only in places where we will feel comfortable? Are there times when we want to lead Jesus rather than allow Him to lead us? God has given us the ability to make choices, and He will not force us to follow Him. However, we run the great risk of losing a great blessing if we fail to follow His leading.

The group comes to a city named Sychar, and they stop at Jacob’s well to replenish their water supply. This is the same Jacob’s well that Jews, Christians and Muslims still travel to today to worship and meditate. Verse 6 reveals an amazing thing- Jesus was tired. When the Word became flesh, He suffered weariness just like you and I do. Jesus needed food and water to live, just like you and I do. And even more important, Jesus looked for opportunities to tell others about the God of the Scriptures- just like you and I need to do.

I say these things because we sometimes fail to appreciate the significance of the human nature of Jesus. His deity is apparent. We call Him Lord for a reason. We know of the miracles he performed, the sacrifices He made and the significance of His dying for our sins. Yet those things can overshadow the fact that He is both fully human and fully God. Why is that important? If Jesus is not fully God, He can not offer forgiveness for our sins and promise eternal life for that is a gift that only God can offer.

Yet His humanity is equally important, for sin has caused a moral and spiritual divide between man and God. Jesus came to bridge that gap, to become one with humanity. Jesus became fully human to truly know and experience the struggles and temptations all of us face. Jesus ate bread and meat and fish, He drank water and wine, He experienced grief and sadness, He laughed, and He wept, and He also expressed righteous anger at times. Those are all things humans do. Unless Jesus knew firsthand what it was like to be human it would be unrighteous for Him to judge us for the things He knew nothing about. If Jesus was not really like us, or fully human, we would still be dead in our sins.

Jesus met the Samaritan woman and His initial request of her is found verse 7- "give me a drink". Consider the contrasts between her encounter with Jesus and that of Nicodemus whom we looked at last week. Nicodemus was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. He was a man and she was a woman. He was a respected member of the religious community and she was a social outcast- a blatant sinner. He recognized Jesus and she didn't- at least at first. He sought out Jesus in the dark of the night and Jesus sought her out in the bright light of high noon. He was wealthy, she was poor.

One thing they did have in common is they both initially missed the spiritual meaning of what Jesus said to them. Nicodemus didn't understand the necessity of being born again and the Samaritan woman didn't catch what Jesus meant by living water. Give me a drink. She was clearly taken back by the question. Seeing his weariness and thirst, she had a dilemma. Should she give in to her inner conscience that said have compassion on someone in need, or should she refuse and justify her actions by saying it would be like giving aid to the enemy? Have you been there? Unable to make up her mind, she asks Jesus a question. Why are you asking me for a drink?

Her problem was one that still exists today- she needed help recognizing Jesus. She needed to dig a little deeper to find the truth. The real question she wanted answered is the one she asks in verse 12. Are you greater than our father Jacob? As some of our conversations with others often do, the discussion had turned from water to religion. She wanted to know the truth about God. Jesus could have said yes and been entirely truthful. Jesus was greater than Jacob. Instead of directly answering her question, Jesus uses the common-human thirst and water- to illustrate the uncommon- that He is indeed greater than Jacob. Physical thirst is temporarily quenched from water, certain to return in a short while. Spiritual thirst, thirst for the truth about God and eternity is quenched once and for all by living water. Verse 14- The water I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up into eternal life. It is water that will sustain us until the day we die. That living water is none other than Jesus Christ.

Like the woman at the well, there will be times when we need to dig a little deeper to find the truth that is right in front of our eyes. Like Jacob's well, the well of Jesus' love is deep enough to quench everyone's thirst. He is the One who satisfies our thirst for truth and spiritual wholeness. Jesus is living water for everyone, no matter who we are or where we come from. I invite you to do what that woman in Samaria did so long ago. After she met Jesus the Bible says she left her water pot at the well. She went back to the city and helped others see Jesus. Because of her faith and her obedience, and her willingness to bridge social, cultural and gender-based boundaries, many other Samaritans also found the truth for themselves. Her thirst for the truth was satisfied by Jesus Christ. I pray that ours may be as well. Amen.