



T H I R D S U N D A Y

J O H N 4 : 7 - 1 5

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't be thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

S C R I P T U R A L B A C K G R O U N D

NIV: When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Last week we left Jesus sitting by the side of Jacob's well, maybe reflecting on the tragic story behind that well and that place. Jesus sent his disciples to a nearby city to buy some food. While they were away, a woman approached to get water from the well.

This woman could not have been happy to see Jesus sitting by the well. You would expect that she, a lone woman encountering a lone man in a deserted place, would have experienced a certain apprehension. And she seems to have spotted very quickly that Jesus was a Jew. Jews and Samaritans shared an ancient hatred of each other that went back hundreds of years. She would have wondered what a Jewish man was doing in Samaria, when so many Jews went far out of their way to avoid encountering Samaritans.

Truth be told, this woman would have been



unhappy to see anyone at the well, man or woman, Samaritan or Jew. The nearby village where the woman lived would have had its own well. Most women in the village would have gone to that well early in the morning to fetch water they would need for the day. Yet here we have a woman who has chosen to go to a well outside of the village during the hottest part of the day. The most plausible explanation for this woman's behavior is that she wants to be alone. For some reason she is avoiding the other women in her village - we immediately suspect that this woman has a story to tell.

Jesus must be able to read from her body language - her refusal to meet his eye - that this woman is not looking for a conversation. He speaks to her anyway, asking for a drink of water. She doesn't hide how stunned she is. "How is that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" she asks.

Jesus tries to draw her into a conversation. "If you knew who was asking you for a drink, you would have asked him to give you a drink, and he would have given you living water." It's obvious that Jesus wants her to ask who he is, but the woman still has her defenses up. She gives Jesus a skeptical glance. "How are you going to give me water? The well is deep, and I don't see your bucket. Or are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well in the first place?"

Jesus says, "Listen, if you drink the water from this well, you

will be thirsty again." Still guarded, she asks for this water to as to not have to continue coming to draw water from the well.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO MINISTRY

This story, perhaps more than any other, reveals the persistence of Jesus. He continues speaking to the woman, chipping away at her skepticism and her defensiveness until the reason for her daily trips to the well is revealed. This woman, it turns out, has had five husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband. Suddenly we understand why she has avoided the disapproving looks and whispered gossip from the other women in the village.

We should note that there is still a lot we don't know about this woman's story. For 2000 years preachers (mostly men) have assumed that she was an adulterous and wicked woman in a dire situation due to her unfaithfulness and promiscuity. It seems far more likely that in reality this woman is a victim of a terrible string of tragic events (i.e. she is a widow five times). People have begun to whisper about how she has been cursed and forsaken by God, and even though she has found a man willing to take her to bed, he is so afraid of the curse that he will not marry her.

Q U E S T I O N S T O P O N D E R

Jesus speaks to this woman for a long time. In fact, this is the longest recorded conversation of Jesus in any of the gospels. Jesus eventually reveals to this woman that he is the long-awaited Messiah; he hasn't even revealed this fact to his disciples, not in so many words. The woman is so astonished by what she sees and hears in Jesus that she runs back to her village and pleads with people to come and meet this man who might be the Messiah.

What a contrast to the timid, defensive woman who just a moment ago went out of her way to avoid those very same people! And what a contrast to the disciples, who are grumpy about being in Samaria and too timid to ask Jesus why he is spending so much time talking to this Samaritan woman! The promise of Jesus is fulfilled before our eyes. Living water bubbles up in this Samaritan woman's soul. Not only that, but we can assume that she never again felt the need to be alone.

In helping communities find a clean, safe, dependable water supply, we work with many community partners. Just as the Samaritan woman helped her entire village find living water in Jesus, so our ministry partners get to share in the joy of transforming their own communities. One of the great joys of the work we do is getting to know the stories of our partners and watching them bubble with joy as they lead the way.

When we know the value of water and understand where it comes from, it's important to remember that water accessibility and affordability is not the same everywhere. Water can be drawn from a well, can be drawn from a river, or it can be sourced from a spring. Water tastes different depending on the landscape and chemical makeup of the land around it.

1. Do you know of the chemical make up of your water?
2. Do you know how it is treated by your local treatment plant?
3. What