



SECOND SUNDAY

JOHN 4:1-6

NIV: Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing more disciples than John -- although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon, when a Samaritan woman came to fetch water for the day.

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

In today's reading we find Jesus and his disciples on the road, passing through the land of the Samaritans. It's a hot day, the sun is beating down, and around noon Jesus spots a well. He decides to sit and rest a while, and maybe refresh himself with some water from Jacob's Well. This well has a storied history found in Genesis 33.

Jacob had done well in life. As a young man with hopes and dreams he went out into the world and, 20 years later, had accomplished nearly all he had set out to do. A wealthy man now, with many goats and sheep and camels and donkeys, he had a large and lively family - 12 sons and a daughter named Dinah. All that remained was to find a pleasant place to settle down.

Jacob packs up his livestock and family and they set off on a journey, looking for a place to call home. Finally Jacob sees what he's been looking for, a plot of land at the foot of a mountain. Something about the place speaks to him. He buys the land and begins building a home.

It was common practice among nomadic/settler communities to dig a well when first settling into a new place. Once his family had access to water, Jacob and his sons started building their home. Meanwhile, Dinah set off to meet the neighbors and make new friends. As she explored the area, she met a young man named Shechem. He was part of the area's most influential family, the son of a Canaanite prince. It is not clear what happened when Shechem and Dinah met. Some scholars believe, and most English translations of the Bible will tell you, that



Shechem assaulted Dinah. Many other scholars believe that what happened was more akin to Romeo and Juliet. Two young people met, felt an immediate connection, sparks flew, and the next thing you know Shechem is requesting her hand in marriage from Jacob.

Shechem and his father visit Jacob and make a substantial offer, to join families. Dinah and Shechem could marry and Jacob's sons could marry the rich man's daughters - to bring a whole new era of prosperity to the community.

Jacob's sons are furious, interrupting the conversation. They state to Shechem, "How dare you defile our sister with your filthy Canaanite hands! We are descendents of Abraham, and we have been circumcised as a sign of our faith in the one, true God. The only way we could possibly consider your proposal would be if you, and all the men of your village, were to be circumcised as we are."

Shechem and his father return to their village and persuade the men of the village to be circumcised. What they don't know is that Dinah's brothers were never going to follow through with the wedding. When all the men of the village were weak and in pain from their circumcisions, the sons of Jacob slip into the village and murder Shechem, his father, and every man in the village.

They seized their sister and returned home.

When they arrive home, Jacob exclaims, "What have you done? We cannot possibly stay in this place. No one will trust us, everyone will fear us, and anyone might attack us. We have to leave this place behind and move on." And so they do. The house they started to build crumbles. Centuries pass. Nearly 2,000 years later, when Jesus passes by, the only thing that remains is the well.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO MINISTRY

There are so many ways to read this story. We can read it as a tragedy of two star-crossed lovers. As a cautionary tale about the ways in which hatred and prejudice can tear a family apart and destroy a community. We can put this story in the category of "Old Testament stories that probably ought to be left alone and not mentioned on Sunday morning".

We can also read this story as an illustration of the power of a drinking well. Jacob's time in that place was brief. His family made terrible mistakes and caused great harm. But, perhaps, they accomplished one truly good thing - something so insignificant at the time, it wasn't mentioned in the Bible.

What was that one good thing? They dug a well.

That well remained long after they were gone. It continued to provide water for that community long after the massacre was a barely remembered, best-forgotten story. The well gave water to Israelites and Canaanites. It gave water to Jews and Samaritans. And one day, many hundreds of years later, that well gave Jesus a place to rest on a hot and dusty day.

That well also became the setting for one of the quintessential stories in the Bible, the woman at the well. This well dug into a community that would soon be soaked with pain and violence, brought Jesus together with a Samaritan woman. It was uncommon for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan, but Jesus lovingly used this opportunity to share his living-water. Those who partook in this living-water would never thirst again and that living-water would never dry-up. Thus, Jesus transformed this well that was once surrounded by conflict and violence, into a place of hope and love for this Samaritan woman and any others who desire to drink the living water. We will dig deeper into this story next Sunday.

Ministry is complicated. These days it may seem like some people who claim the name of Jesus do as much harm as they do good. But even in the most difficult and complicated of times, there are a few things that will always be true. One of those things is that digging wells is

good, useful and pleasing to God. Or, to paraphrase Jesus in Matthew 10:42, whoever gives a cup of cold water to a thirsty and weary traveler will receive a reward that can never be taken away. If we are given the opportunity to tend to the thirsty, the hungry, or the lost, we should take action. We all need water to live and we all need the living water that Jesus provides for our salvation as well.

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

One of the best ways to understand how to value our water is to recognize its importance in our lives. Consider these questions this week:

- How much water do I use daily?
- How would my life be impacting by having to walk miles each day to obtain my water and then boil it before it is safe for use?
- How can I work to meet the needs of those in my community? in the World?
- How can I share the living water, that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, with those around me?
- Are you allowing the living-water of the gospel to transform you into a well that is "springing up into everlasting life"?