

A woman who once was lovely to look at came to the well at noonday. No one goes to the well to draw water except in the cool of the day, in the morning or in the evening. Jacobs' well is 137 feet deep, still today – 137 feet deep. Why, oh, why would anyone go at noon, except to avoid the stares and gloats of the other women of the village. How did this woman at the well become so ostracized? In my sanctified imagination, I can give you a possible answer. She married in her early teens, and her young husband was killed in a raid from a neighboring village. She then married a sweet man who died during the famine. She was lucky, if you can call it that, to find a husband willing to take a twice-widowed woman as his wife, but he was an up-and-coming elder in the community and when he found someone whose beauty was not fading, he cast her aside simply by writing out a certificate of divorce in the presence of two men in the village. She was thankful that she had not brought a child into her desperate world. She finally was taken in by a man who was more cruel than she could ever have imagined. He did marry her but soon after abandoned her to a life on the street begging. Finally she was taken in by a man who despised her, but who was pleased to take her service in the house and in his bed. But he would never marry her, nor did she want to be bound to someone who hated her. That is why she was an outcast in the village and why she came to draw water in the heat of the day when the other women would not shriek at her and throw things in her way. She was reconciled to her life as an outcast.

She was thirsty so she approached the well even though there was a man sitting by it that day. She would have been happy to just draw some water and leave, but Jesus said to her: “Give me a drink.” Earlier in her life she would not have dared to speak to a man other than one she was related to by birth or marriage. Plus, she recognized the man as a Jew, and she was a Samaritan woman who knew better than to speak to Jewish man.¹ She did not know who this man was. She had no idea that this man was a rabbi. How could

she have known? She did not know that it was Jesus. But she had no dignity left so she spoke; she asked Jesus how a Jewish man would ask a Samaritan woman for a drink. She was surprised by his answer. She truly did not understand. What did he mean when he said that if she knew that God gives to those who ask and that he was God's agent then she would be the one asking for a drink. And that if she would only ask, she would receive living water. Living water, she thought: does he mean water bubbling up from the well as she had heard Jacob had received?² Jesus referred to "water gushing up to eternal life." That was even more confusing. How could this man be a fountain of living water? But she sensed he was authentic when he said that those who drank from the well would be thirsty, but those who drank the living water would never be thirsty again. And she said: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

It was then that she admitted that she had no husband. Jesus told her about all her husbands and the one she was with who was not her husband either. Surely this man was a prophet. When she said that she knew that the Messiah was coming and would explain all things and that then she would understand. Jesus identified himself, saying: "I am he...." He told this non-Jew that God not only is coming but is here.

The woman at the well was thirsty for a kind word or just a look of something other than disdain. And Jesus not only engaged this disreputable, ostracized, foreign woman, but he made her the heroine of this story and an evangelist telling the world who he was. Living water? At first the Samaritan woman wondered: what is that? I wonder: are we thirsty? What do we thirst for? Do we long for living waters? Where is that living water, for us and for the whole world? In John's Gospel, *living water* is the vehicle of the gift of the Spirit in baptism. And indeed we baptize with water and the Holy Spirit – with living water – so that we can go forth – like the Samaritan woman – and spread the good news.

But first things first: we need to really know who Jesus was and is.

Who did this woman think she was? That was the question for the disciples although it was unspoken. But the Samaritan woman was thinking: ‘Who is this man?’ A prophet, yes, but he said that he is the one – the Messiah. She had to sort out who Jesus was. We too want – no, we need – to know who Jesus was and is.

It has become apparent to me that who Jesus is at any given moment for me and for us depends much on our own needs at that time in our life.

“The truth is that the immensity of Christ towers over Western civilization.

Most Christians find their best definition rising from their need.

To the hurting, he is the great Physician.

To the confused, he is the Light.

To the lost, he is the Way.

To the hungry, he is the Bread of Life.

To the thirsty, he is the Water of life.

To the broken, he is the Balm of Gilead.”³

Jesus revealed himself to the Samaritan woman, a hurting, lost, confused, thirsty woman. She wanted to wait for the Messiah, but he told her – and he showed her – that he was the Messiah. She was a broken woman, and this man who claimed to be the Messiah healed her. He told her who she was so that she could be healed and begin a new life, healed by the living water, healed by the Balm of Gilead. She left her water jar at the well and went to spread the word. Yes, she became an evangelist. Her new life began at Jacob’s well. Once she knew who Jesus was to her, then she knew who she was and that her new calling was to tell people who Jesus was.

Is that not what we are called to do? By living water at our Baptism we were called to spread the gospel to all people. But first we have to know who Jesus was and is.

Our challenge is to come to know who Jesus, who he is to us – individually and corporately – as 21st century Christians at St. Andrew’s By-the-Sea. Are we thirsty for living water? Aren’t we 21st century Christians living in a secular world haunted by Jesus Christ – a world that does not yet know that what they are thirsty for is Jesus? Haven’t we all heard people say that there is something missing in their lives? Could it be that what is missing is the living water of life: Jesus, the Savior of the world – Jesus the living water –

Jesus who offers us all eternal life? May we all be like the Samaritan woman and say: “Give us living water!” AND then let us go and tell others about Jesus. We could borrow her words: “Come and see a man.” Come and see this Jesus! Come get to know who Jesus was and is!

Lord, may it be so.

Amen.

¹ Remember that Samaritans and the Jews were at odds. They differed in the sacred site for proper worship. The people of Samaria worshipped on Mount Gerizim. And the Jews claimed Jerusalem as the only place to worship God. Samaritans accepted only part of the Bible, rejecting the prophets who spoke of the coming of the Messiah.

² Based on a measurement made in 1935, the total depth of the well is 135 ft. See [https://en.wikipedia.org > wiki > Jacob's_Well](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Well).

³ Calvin Miller, *The Book of Jesus*, p. 33.