

Jesus the Water of Life John 4

There was a time when I was younger, when I did not really like God all that much. It started when I was about ten and lasted until age thirty or so. Now as I reflect on that, I begin to understand my feeling of dislike. I grew up in an environment – both at home and in the church – where God was pictured as a bookkeeper and judge. Instead of thinking of God as one who was compassionate, and loving – I pictured God as an old man - watching me, checking to see if I was doing something wrong.

Needless to say, I was raised with many rules: what clothes to wear for each occasion, when to speak, when to keep quiet. Even in church life, there were things I could do, and then there were things that I was not allowed to do. What bothered me was that a lot of these rules were in place because it had always been done that way. This was very hard for me – because as you may off guessed by now – it seemed that keeping all these rules somehow went against my nature. And so I found it hard to love a God whose only interest in me was checking to see if I was keeping all the rules.

But Jesus – that was something different. I often said during that time – that I was a Christian because of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved people for who they were. He even loved tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus loved sinners, and I have always known in my heart that Jesus loved me. That is why I love this story so much. For this is a story of Jesus reaching out to someone – someone whom I suspect, also had a hard time keeping rules.

The most direct route from Jerusalem to Galilee was the one Jesus took. Yet we need to keep in mind that most Jews would not have traveled this route. Instead they would have taken a detour so that they would not have to set foot in Samaria. Samaria was considered as enemy country. But Jesus intentionally travels through Samaria. Actually Jesus plans on stopping at the local rest spot in Samaria. For Jesus knew - that the time had come to share Jehovah God with everyone – even with the Samaritans – the ones the Israelites had classified as the untouchables.

Up till now, the Israelites believed that Jehovah God was just for them. The Israelites also believed that they were the only ones who really knew how to properly worship God. They knew that the best place to worship God was to be in Jerusalem – at the temple, following all the religious rituals. But Jesus goes through Samaria – for he wants to signal that with him, things change. Jesus is ushering in new beginnings.

And again, for most of us, for Jesus to be talking to a Samaritan woman does not seem like a big deal. Yet it is a big deal. Jews did not talk to Samaritans. Jews avoided the Samaritans like the plague. As a matter of fact, there was a rule about Jews touching something unclean, such as a Samaritan. If a Jew touched something which a Samaritan had touched – the Jewish person would be consider to be unclean. And in keeping with the rules, he would not be allowed into the temple or even be with other people for that day. The unclean person would have to wash their clothes, and bathe with water. They would be considered to be unclean until evening.

Jesus, however, talks to an unknown woman – which a Jewish man would not do – and he is asking her for a drink of water. This is crazy! And it is not lost on the Samaritan woman. She questions Jesus – why is he acting so strangely.

But Jesus sees right through this woman. He sees that she is a needy person. And instead of answering her question, he offers her the water - water which will quench her thirst for all time. The woman takes Jesus' words literally. She is skeptical. She is a very practical person. She asks Jesus just how he intends to give her water, when he doesn't even have a bucket to draw water with. Just how does he propose to give her water? Does he think that he is greater than Father Jacob, the one who dug the well in the first place.

But she is thinking, and when Jesus offers her the water a second time, she changes her mind. She has decided that Jesus is more than a crazy, thirsty Jew who is into breaking the rules. She is beginning to think that perhaps Jesus has a gift she needs. Instead of seeing a man without a bucket, she thinks that perhaps this man can give her the water which will quench her thirst. So she responds to Jesus' offer – she will have some life giving water.

In helping her to understand what he is really offering, Jesus asks the woman to go get her husband. When she answers that she doesn't have one – Jesus lets her know that he already knows all about her. The woman's mind quickly changes gears – this man must be a prophet! She quickly asks Jesus a question: a point of religious order. “Where is the right place to worship God.

And that is exactly how God works; isn't it. The woman asks Jesus the very question that Jesus is in fact answering by coming to Samaria. By going through Samaria, Jesus is signaling that Jehovah God is God of all – for both Jews and Samaritans; for Jews and Gentiles; for English and Asian and African. God so loves the world that he gave his only son to die for all people – and that all who believe in him, will have eternal life. They will all be given the living water. And this God, who loves all the people – can also be worshipped everywhere! There is no right place. What is important is the object of our worship – the Father, Jehovah God. What is important is that we worship him in spirit and in truth.

Jesus' response confuses the Samaritan woman. What does this mean: one can worship God anywhere as long as they worship in spirit and in truth? But instead of asking Jesus to explain what he means, the woman decides that she will leave this explanation to the Messiah. But Jesus is not finished with this woman even though she might be done with this conversation. Jesus is still offering this living water. And so he continues on. He tells the Samaritan woman that in fact he is the Messiah. He is the one who can explain all things. He is the one who gives meaning to life.

And in revealing himself to the Samaritan woman, Jesus presents her with a choice: a moment of decision. She must decide whether to refuse or to accept the living water he as the Messiah offers.

If she refuses – she stays with the well water. Her life will not change. She will continue in her same old ways: changing husbands and lovers every so often; running and hiding from the women of the town; paying lip-service to her religion.

But if she accepts Jesus' offer of living water – she will be a changed woman, a new woman, a born again woman, a new creation. Like what the apostle Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, she or he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” The Spirit of God will change her from the inside out; will change her from head to toe!

But she must decide! And she does! The Samaritan woman leaves her water jug beside the well. She leaves the well – a new woman. Instead of avoiding people – she tells them what has happened to her. Even though she doesn't understand exactly all the teaching of this Jewish man – this Messiah – she knows that something significantly has happened to her because of her interaction with him. She has decided to allow this Messiah to touch her life in a very real way – and it has changed her. And she is willing to share this with all those she meets. And God blesses that. For we read that because of this woman's sharing of her meeting with Jesus, many more Samaritans come to the well. They come to meet the Messiah – they come to meet Jesus. For they too, want to drink from this living water.

When I think about my own life – I can relate to the Samaritan woman. Oh, I have grown older – I have mellowed – I understand more the need for some rules – I have truly learned to love God. But like the Samaritan woman – my life has its share of broken dreams; of wishing that things were different. Often I do not understand how the details of my life are going to work out. We all have our struggles; our hurts and disappointments; our frustrations and our fears. We all find ourselves needing true meaning in life. We all need life giving water.

And the good news is that Jesus is still offering this life-giving water. It doesn't matter who we are or what our nationality is. It doesn't matter what we have done with our lives so far – whether we are regular church goers or not. What is important is that even today, Jesus is offering each of us a new start – a new beginning. All we need to do is make a decision.

If we refuse Jesus' offer of life-giving water – we will stay with well water – our lives will not change. We will continue in our old ways. We will continue to be disappointed with life. We will continue to see the glass of water half empty rather than half full. We will continue to blame other people, or even God for our troubles. We will keep on having this sense of being unhappy – lacking the joy and the peace that we know in our hearts, exists. We will keep paying lip service to our religion – keeping up with the rituals we either agree with or enjoy.

BUT if we accept Jesus' offer of life giving water – we will leave our jugs of fear, our jugs of worries beside the well. If we decide to accept Jesus' offer, we will leave all of our hurts and frustration with him. **AND OUR LIVES WILL CHANGE!** Instead of thinking that we have to be in control of our lives, we can give control to God – we can actually let God be God! Instead of thinking that we need to do everything on our own, we can surrender our needs to God.

When we have this life giving water, when we have the Holy Spirit within us – we will experience God's joy, God's peace. We will experience a sense of well-being; a sense of hopefulness. But remember, I am not saying that your life is going to change in terms of ease. Accepting Jesus into your life, being changed – does not translate into all of your problems being solved. It is not as if we have won some sort of spiritual lottery – and there is suddenly an overflow of warm fuzzies. God does not practice magic. God gives grace; God gives strength, God gives comfort and courage. What it means to be a new person is to focus on God – and on his goodness in our lives. And then, to share that with those we interact with.

There are times when I meet with people and they tell me that they read Scripture, they pray – but it doesn't seem to make any difference in their life. Their life is just the same – nothing is different – the same old problems day after day.

Yet this story – this Scripture tells us that when the Samaritan woman left her jug with Jesus, and when she shared what God had done for her – her life changed. She was no longer self-conscious – wondering if what she was doing was the right thing. She just shared in her excitement and others came to hear Jesus for themselves. And this is key for our life as well. We truly need to leave our jugs with Jesus, and we need to share God's goodness with others. We need to focus on God.

I know from my own life that when I focus on the negative – and what is not going well in my life – I don't experience God's joy or peace. But when I choose to focus on God: my attitude changes and my life changes. I feel hopeful. When I read Scripture, looking for God's faithfulness – or pray, expecting God to hear my prayer, I do experience joy and peace. And interestingly enough, when I share my story of how God has been faithful to me, of how God has worked in my life, or when I listen to other people's stories – this sense of peace grows.

There have been times when Sid and I have met with friends, and after sharing a need or concern, we actually prayed together. One time was the day of our son's wedding. We were meeting with a number of friends – some of us had not gotten together for a long time. After a couple of hours catching up on each other's lives, we prayed together. It was a powerful experience. I remember how right after nine eleven, we gathered for prayer. Oh, how we short change ourselves by not sharing and praying together more often.

And so this is my invitation to you this morning: for each of us to leave our jugs of worry, our jugs of fear at the well and to drink deeply from the life-giving water that Jesus offers. And then, share our joy, your story of how God keeps touching your life – with others. And know that God will bless this. For when we begin to share God's joy in our lives with others, not only with words, but also with how we live our lives – people will notice – and they too will find themselves come to this life-giving well of water.