

“If You Knew the Gift”
Sermon by the Rev. Sharon Taylor
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John 4:3-42

I suppose this woman’s day was ordinary. We might surmise that she had been doing the normal, daily, household chores and had walked to the well with her water jars to fill them.

Her trip to the well was not quite the norm, however. She came at mid-day, around noon, and alone. Other women would have come much earlier, or later, and they would have come together, to draw their water. Sort of a daily social event—similar to small towns in America where everyone goes to the Post Office about the same time...to meet & greet, and chat for awhile.

But this woman was out of sync with her trip to the well because she was out of sync with the normal standards of the community.

A woman who ran through husbands like loose change was an obvious sinner. Her moral lapse was right out there for everyone to see and to judge. Therefore, she was derided and snubbed.

But what was an ordinary day, an ordinary daily trip to the well, to fetch the water needed for ordinary mundane household chores, turned into an extraordinary, unordinary, exceptional, even momentous event in this woman’s life.

The stranger seated beside the well, who happened to be a Jewish man, spoke to her, a Samaritan woman. “Give me a drink,” he said.

The day stopped being ordinary right then. In that day, in that culture, men did not speak to women in public. Furthermore, Jews loathed Samaritans.

From the Jewish perspective on “order,” i.e. how society is set up and governed, God ruled over man, and man ruled over woman. Women were “kept” by men, really to the point that women were considered chattel...that rhymes with cattle! ☺ Women were not considered second-class citizens. A woman’s only status was in relation to men: the man who fathered her, the man who married her, the male babies she gave birth to, the man who

widowed her. A woman was some man's daughter, some man's wife, some man's mother, some man's widow; she belonged to someone.

Women were so discounted that there was a traditional prayer prayed by Jewish men that included the phrase, "Thank God, I was not born a woman." Men did not talk to women in public. It was beneath them.

It was out of the ordinary that the stranger sitting by the well spoke to the woman.

The Samaritans were descendants of Israelites of the northern kingdom who had intermarried with aliens, i.e. non-Jews. The Samaritans worshipped the same God as the "purebred" Jews, but they were effectively cast out of the Jewish mainstream because of the inter-racial, inter-national, cross-boundary marriages. They weren't pure. They were not considered true heirs of the covenant....The true Sons of Abraham considered the Samaritans to be disinherited from the Chosen People.

The Jewish man asking the Samaritan woman for a drink was asking for contamination. Surely, using a Samaritan bucket to draw water and a water-ladle to drink from would have been sinful....because the Samaritan utensils would have been impure or unclean.

Given these two historical social standards that erected a definite barrier between these two individuals who happened into each other's space at this well, given these "don't talk, don't touch" rules, can you imagine the surprise in the Samaritan woman's voice, *How is it that you, a man, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?*

Perhaps it comes with being out-of-sync and deviant from the social standards of her day, but the woman had some spunk; she had some spark; she may have even been flirting with the stranger. Lucky for her that she did. Her quick little jab....*How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria....*got an interesting, intriguing, equally spunky, answer.

*If you **knew** the gift of God...*
*If **you** **knew** the gift of God...*
*If you knew the **gift** of God...*
*If you knew the gift of **God**...*

Well, how did He say that?

*If you knew the gift of God,
and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,”
you would have asked Him,
and He would have given you **living water**.*

I want us to pause for a minute and consider the import of what has happened thus far in this story.

A woman who evidently has not conducted her life with the strictest morality.... (Is that an understatement?)...was making her way through a rather typical, ordinary day, not expecting anything but the usual, **got jostled by God!**

I mean, we know who the stranger by the well was. That woman got jostled by the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Didn't Jesus get her attention? ☺
The man, Jesus, talked to her, the woman, in public.
The Jew, Jesus, addressed her, the Samaritan.

I don't know what kind of answer she might have been expecting. But I think she was tickled and intrigued to have this stranger, this Jewish man, engage her.

He popped a little puzzle at her: *If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*

Listen to her response: She's into the riddle; she's fascinated by this unorthodox man; and yes, she's even flirtatious.

Oh, sir, you don't have anything to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? (Fluttering her long, silky eyelashes) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle? (Tilting her head coyly, expecting more entertaining repartee with this man)

But it wasn't just entertaining, flirtatious, repartee. She revealed her depth of knowledge of her people's faith and their traditions.

The figure of Jacob loomed larger than life for both Jews and Samaritans. Jacob was a hero of the faith, a true man of God, who knew God in an intimate way, had even wrestled with God through the night....and came away with a blessing. He's the one who is credited with digging this well and see what a fine well it has been all these generations.

"So who are you?" the woman asked the stranger.

His answer: More than you've ever seen, or tasted, or known, *Everyone who drinks of this water—this well water, this dead water, this mortal water-, will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give, will never thirst; the water that I shall give you will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

The woman wasn't sure what Jesus was talking about, but she wanted some of that special, living water, right then!

So much for her ordinary day.

And so much for **our** ordinary days.

Because Jesus is found not only by those who are seeking Him but by those who are not seeking Him.

It is amazing....God's grace sometimes unexpectedly brings unexpected persons to conversion, new life, and salvation.

God's grace sometimes comes out of the blue.

You know how it is: when you weren't looking, the Spirit of the Living God, blew upon you.

When you weren't expecting it, or worthy of it, grace fell into your lap, and into your heart. ☺ So much for an ordinary life!

Jesus directed this surprised woman to bring her husband to Him, and she bumbled back with a lie, *I have no husband*. What was she thinking?! *Just*

give me some of this living water...I want it! Or, He won't give it to me if I'm not righteous enough, good enough, if knows how I've lived my life.

Jesus countered whatever thought she was having: *You're right, you've had five husbands, and the man you're with now is not your husband.*

How embarrassing. To have been offered the gift of a lifetime and then to be caught immediately in a lie.

But actually it was grace all over again. Jesus let her know that He knew everything about her....**and still offered her the gift of living water.** Please take note, Jesus Christ knows everything about each one of us, even the stuff we lie about....and it does not change his offer of the gift of living water.

The woman tries to recover from her lie and to put limits on grace. *Yes, but, she says, Jews worship in Jerusalem and we Samaritans worship on this mountain....Now somebody's right and somebody's wrong.*

The man who offered her living water essentially said, *That old squabble is inconsequential. You're arguing about things that don't matter. What matters is that people worship in spirit and in truth.* ----Ooooh, He did catch that lie, didn't He?

This is a great story. Nobody was blind who received their sight. Nobody was lame and got their mobility back. Nobody was sick in bed and was touched by Jesus and made well. Somebody was changed, however.

The woman who had no company on her daily walk to the well because she was an obvious sinner and thereby shunned by the rest of the community, probably had no real friends, probably had been exorcised from extended family gatherings, certainly wasn't welcome in the house of worship. She gets so excited about what this man is offering...and their conversation... that she hurries back to town to get everyone to come out and meet Him. She insisted they come.

Here's what I think. Everyone is the Samaritan woman at the well. Going about the daily chores of living, guilty of, shall we say, indiscretions—some obvious, some not so; no one is sinless...

And everyone, in some way, is thirsty. Everyone describes their thirst in some way...

A thirst for happiness,
A thirst for love,
A thirst for forgiveness and fresh starts,
A thirst for meaning and purpose in life,
A thirst for peace.

Everyone can tell of the barren deserts or treacherous wilderness in their lives.

People can describe their depressions, their thoughts of suicide, the abuse in their families, their addictions, their discouragements, their apathy, their rejection.

And we keep trying to quench our thirst with temporal solutions. That's what that Samaritan woman was doing, trying to quench her thirst---that no husband, no boyfriend, no paramour, would ever be able to quench--- because it's a deep, interior, spiritual thirst.

We try to quench our thirst with temporal solutions---Solutions that may satisfy momentarily, but we always thirst again.

We try a trip abroad, a different job, a new gym, an affair, a new house, a new spouse, anything....looking for a real, genuine, effective, thirst quencher.

But ultimately, we end up still thirsty.

Before we give up on satisfying our thirst ... for meaning, for happiness, for love, for peace, for forgiveness, for a fresh start...before we give up the search and become crotchety cynics, **we need to give the stranger by the well a chance....He said that he had a genuine thirst-quencher.**

If you knew the gift of God, He said, If you knew the gift of God, you would ask, and I will give you living water and you will never be thirsty again.

Before anyone dies of thirst, please know there is Someone who can give refreshment, and will give refreshment....Jesus Christ.

It could be today.....Shall we pray----

Jesus said, *“If anyone thirsts, let him, let her, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of his/her heart shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)*