

(Exodus 17:1-7 NIV) All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Reph'idim; but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people found fault with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you find fault with me? Why do you put the LORD to the proof?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand the rod with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah^[a] and Mer'ibah,^[b] because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the LORD to the proof by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

(John 4:5-42 NIV) So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. ¹⁰ Jesus answered 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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." ²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the city and were coming to him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. ³⁶ He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." ³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

COME AND SEE

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A Mother decided it was time that her three sons to get baptized. So, after weeks of suitable instruction, she felt they were ready. One bright Sunday morning, they were on their way to the church where the three boys were to have their sins washed away.

The mother noticed that her youngest extremely quiet, so she asked him what was on his mind.

"Mom, can I go first?" he replied.

"Why do you want to first?" she asked her son with a smile.

"Because," he said, "I don't want to be baptized in water that has all of my brother's sins floating around in it."

Children aren't the only ones who have a hard time with the symbolic language about living water. This woman about whom we read in the fourth chapter of John is thinking about water from a well. She has in mind the sort of water that would quench one's thirst for a few hours at most. She is thinking of the kind of water that would lose its potency after one brother's baptism. But Jesus is talking about living water that will provide eternal life for the one who drinks of it; is cleansed by it.

In this conversation between the woman and Jesus, it's clear that Jesus is offering her more than a life that goes on forever, consisting of an endless stream of troubled and broken relationships. He is offering her more than whatever alienation and humiliation she might be experiencing now without an end in sight. But it's also clear that she is not capable of imagining anything better than what she knows firsthand. She focuses on keeping things the way they are, keeping her head above water. She puts all her energy into avoiding the landlord and the bill collector for one more month. She fixates on getting her next meal and keeping a roof over her head.

All of her questions and comments are on that level. They are talking past each other. The woman's conversation is about water. Jesus is talking about abundant overflowing life and about all people refreshed and cleansed by the living water of God's forgiving love.

She is like a child who has only ever eaten baby food, trying to think about pastries and cakes displayed in a bakery window. Jesus is like an engineer working to explain to an 8-year old how a suspension bridge supports the weight of traffic. And it is such a beautiful passage of scripture because each one of us can put ourselves in the place of the woman. The most blessed among us have only ever known something that falls far short of what Jesus describes.

Our best relationships are full of moments of distance and misunderstanding and unhappiness, all mixed up with whispers and hints of closeness and intimacy and joy. We take the good with the bad, and we muddle through because it is the best we know. At our best, we are children playing with grown-up toys. That woman in John 4 knew about disappointment and rejection and abuse. She also could imagine a better existence. What she had difficulty understanding was that Jesus knew her and loved her for who she was. She didn't need to hide from him, and not hiding from him was the beginning of experiencing the forgiveness that leads to the sort of life she could only imagine.

The woman at the well tried to disguise her pain at having been rejected by five men and being in a relationship with one who wouldn't be bothered with the demands of marriage. The woman couldn't hear what Jesus had to say about his offer of peace and wholeness because she was preoccupied with the mundane everyday issues of life. She was focused on trying to preserve her life and minimize the hurt and pain she felt.

Jesus offered her the same thing that he provides us. Jesus offered a life that is whole not because it is locked away and hidden from view, but because it is washed clean and made new. Jesus doesn't offer a life that is more of the same over and over again. Jesus provides an

experience that is different and fresh, a life that doesn't have to be covered up and disguised out of shame. Jesus says your life is a mess, but I love you anyway. I accept you and, if I choose you, what anyone else believes is irrelevant. Jesus enables the woman to see herself through his eyes. Jesus links arms with her and says, to all creation, "She's mine." If I claim she's okay, then she's okay. The woman has entered into a partnership; a friendship with Jesus.

I used to have a friend who, whenever I talked about spiritual things, always came back with the question, "What does that look like? Our story concludes by drawing a picture for us. We see that when the disciples return, she leaves abruptly, leaving her water jar behind. She runs to the Samaritan town, a place filled with people who shoved her aside and ridiculed her and ignored her. Perhaps she had always suspected that they had hurt her and brushed her off because they were just like her and they didn't want to acknowledge their brokenness.

Now that she had found the cure for brokenness. She, because she is a generous soul, has to share what she has learned. We know she is changed because she wants others to have what she has. She says to them, forget what you think about me, I have just met a man who told me everything I had ever done. In other words, he knew what kind of person I am, and he still wants to talk with me. Could this be the messiah?

She was no longer pretending that the abuse and the disdain that she had suffered didn't hurt. She was an open book, and they could tell that she was changed. Jesus is the one who knows us as we are and loves us anyway. Jesus is the one who can satisfy our longing to be okay without having to hide.

Jesus loves me just as I am without one plea. And that is the thing for which we thirst above all. Having been loved, we are free from the burden of guilt, free from the taint of sin. We are open to sharing our lives with those who want the forgiveness and love that Jesus offers. The moment that we apprehend the truth that God loves us without reservation without qualification then all the energy we once used for hiding and covering up can be used for sharing and giving, even as the Father has given Jesus to us.

Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did, and then he did not reject me but laid his life down for me. And he'll do the same for you. Accept anew, because we tend to forget, that no sins are floating around in the living water of baptism. That living water has the power to dissolve all sin. When you accept God's forgiving love in Christ, you are being made clean. Isaiah writes, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Thanks be to God, Amen.