

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

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Third Sunday in Lent

John 4:1-42

Well...Now That's a Deep Subject

This long story can be summarized by seven two-word phrases:

Scorching heat.
All alone.
Daily grind.
Unexpected encounter.
Spiritual truth.
Abandoned jar.
Powerful influence.

And yet we know that these seven phrases only give us hints and brief glimpses of what was truly a life-altering encounter for the Samaritan woman. There is much more going on than the well and the water jar at the center of the story.

We meet a woman who had been widowed and/or divorced five times. And now she is with someone who for whatever reason she is not married to. She had come to the well in the scorching heat of the day by herself. She had no friends for conversation. There was no banter to soften her hard life or lighten her load.

And the need for water (and it is a NEED because, as we know, water is life) means that she must make regular trips to the well. It is believed that she wouldn't go when the other women of the village went, so that she could avoid their ridicule, or "polite" whispering behind her back just loud enough for her to hear.

Life for her was predictable at best.

Thirsting....Trudging...Filling...Returning...Load-bearing...Drinking...Emptying.

Doing the predictable grind all over again.

Then one day, a divine interruption she never expected startles her out of her routine. "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7) Jesus had asked her. And yet, what seems like a simple enough question was full of dangerously thorny issues:

What was a Jew doing at this well — didn't they all go between Judea and Galilee by traveling along the Jordan?

Why would a Jew ask a Samaritan for a drink — didn't Jews and Samaritans avoid conversation and certainly refuse to share drinking and eating utensils?

Why would a Jewish Rabbi, a man, talk to a woman in public?

What was this Jewish Rabbi after — because why would a man pay attention to her if he wasn't after something?

The scene is paradoxical. Here is the giver of living water, thirsty himself. And so we have a thirsty Messiah and a resourceful woman finding out that they need each other — a wonderful metaphor for how God and humanity are intimately interconnected.

Well, Jesus' response was a typical Jesus response, not answering her question, and offering something more confusing:

If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water (John 4:10).

And so the back and forth which takes them deeper and deeper begins.

Her questions hint to Jesus of her longing for something that her current life cannot provide her. Just as much as Nicodemus had needed a fresh start at life (John 3:3-7), so does she. Both need Jesus to help them start over with the help of God's Spirit — the living water only Jesus could provide.

It's the same for us...

We find ourselves in situations we would not have chosen.

Our lives are in ruts — some of our own making, some not...

We want more; we're hungry/thirsty for something — and maybe we don't even know what for.

We wonder:

God, why did you let this happen to me?

God, where are you in all of this?

God, when are you coming to rescue me? I'm not sure how much longer I can hold on.

So often it seems our questions, and worries, and concerns, and longings get flung into the ether with the hope that Jesus will not just hear and notice, but will RESPOND. We hear stuff about Jesus being near. But what does that look like, and what does that mean?

I think we **are** like the woman at the well — asking for one thing; and then Jesus gives us something else — something better though, something deeper and longer lasting.

Perhaps she wants to not have to go to the well in the heat of the day to get water anymore.

Perhaps she wants her life to not be as it is, riddled with grief.

Perhaps we want life to not be as it is...for things to become easier, less drama.

Well — now that's a deep subject — as we say in our house....

Well — Jesus gives her — and us — something else altogether!

He gives living water, which will satisfy long after we've drained our bucket and drunk our fill.

And Jesus can give this, because Jesus is not just another Rabbi, but is the One — the Messiah — the Savior — the one who saves.

And just like the woman who discovers more and more about him the longer she talks to him, we too will come to know the depth of Jesus' power and presence the more we talk to and about him. I know it's not the same as having him in the flesh.

So what does it look like?

These days it looks more like the Wednesday night discussion group we have going on right now, where we discuss and discover who Jesus was, and the powerful impact he had on those who knew him up close and personal...and then how those people shared and became the early church. (*The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel)

Sometimes it looks like a new commitment to reading the little devotion books we have for you on the back tables and the info rack downstairs, or a Bible app (*YouVersion*), or a daily email devotion (*First Things First* or *3 O'Clock Wake Up*).

Because, while Jesus offers the living water, we won't know its relief if we don't take it from him and drink it. Because the water he offers is he himself!

And when you increase your intake of Jesus, his words and ways, your life will change...for the better of course.

Have you heard what's going on in California these days?

California has been so unseasonably wet that its deserts are experiencing what's called a "super bloom." After years of drought, this year's conditions were perfect for this: long steady rain throughout the winter — a remarkable 6 inches in all — that soaked deep into the ground.

And so the normally dry desert is lush. California's largest state park, in the desert south of Palm Springs, is a sea of flowers.

Tourists are coming from all over the world. This super bloom is so rare, so special, that drivers are causing traffic jams, and people are getting lost in the hillsides and fainting from dehydration — just to take in the beauty.

One park ranger says that this is a really big deal; there are flowers in places where you usually don't see them, like in the badlands.

Some of these seeds have been underground for maybe decades, if not a century or more, there's no way to know. Some of these places have not seen water in 10, 15, 20 years, and now they're a blanket of flowers. In other words, they are survivors.

So, if this is what can happen with the water that falls from the sky; imagine what will happen in your life with the water that comes from the one who made you and loves you!

Amen.