

Lent 3 Year A

I was wondering if any of you have taken on reading more of the Bible as a Lenten discipline. It's certainly a commendable one, and if so you've made great progress today because, given the length of that gospel lesson, I think we've just read about ¼ of the NT!

The story of Jesus and the woman at the well is long and rich and multi-layered, so my biggest problem is trying to keep this reasonably SHORT.

There are many things we could explore in this story: The way Jesus crossed over the gender barriers of his day. The way Jesus crossed over the cultural barriers of his day. The way Jesus takes things from the natural world, like water, and uses them to talk about the supernatural, like spiritual nourishment and eternal life.

But as sometimes happens, I noticed something different as I reflected on this story; something I hadn't noticed before. Not an earth shattering point necessarily, but one that gave me another angle from which to understand the story, one that also led to an insight about living the Christian life.

When we think about this story, we usually think about Jesus' teaching on Living Water, or how Jesus knew all about the woman's relational complexities, or how they had a little back and forth about proper worship, and so on.

But what struck me as I considered this long story with its multiple parts and sometimes unclear rhetoric was this:

She was just trying to get some water.

This was not someone who followed Jesus from town to town. This was not someone trying to get Jesus to heal her or someone she loved. By all appearances, this woman got up like any other day and was going about her chores like any other day, which included a walk

to the well for water, where she unexpectedly had a chance meeting with Jesus that changed her life forever.

She just wanted some water, but she apparently had needs that she didn't even know she had. A need to be known, a need to be heard, a need to be accepted, a need ultimately for God.

I don't know about you, but there's a lot I can relate to in this woman. Don't get me wrong. I haven't had 5 wives or anything, but I do remember way back when I was a bit of a wayward young man, I got up and went through each day unaware of the need I had for God in my life, and just as the woman tripped over Jesus one day, I kind of tripped over him through the love of other godly people and my life has never been the same. I suspect that some of you came to faith, or deeper faith, similarly.

Seeing this story from the woman's perspective reminds us that, while what we do in church is important, its importance has a lot to do with preparing us to go back out to our lives, to the wells in our lives, and be there for the people who THINK they just need some water, but in fact need to be known, to be heard, to be accepted, and ultimately need God.

Now with that said, it's probably worth acknowledging that we Episcopalians are not the great evangelists of the world. But with this story as an example, we see that we don't need to be anything other than ourselves.

Perhaps we can work on being comfortable enough with ourselves as Christians that when we encounter someone at the water cooler, in the neighborhood, at the shop, and we see the need, that we are comfortable enough to give a word of hope, a word of encouragement, a word of faith.

She just wanted some water, but by Providence she received so much more. We're just normal Episcopal Christians. But we have living water that is needed by others whom we appear to meet merely by chance. Amen.