

“Is this water . . . living?”

John 4:5-42

March 15, 2020

During today’s meditation, you will have to have your imagination working overtime. Imagine the baptismal font is the well in our town.

Each and every morning the women of our village come to draw water from the well. Later in the day, someone else arrives; this in part, is her story.

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Where do people meet God? How do people meet God?

I’ve read a few stories, where people describe their meeting with God. Before I read their accounts, I had my preconceived ideas.

First one – I thought that **all** believers had some dramatic spiritual experience, some encounter with the divine. Wrong!

2nd – I also thought that they were all searching for God. Wrong!

Where would they have been looking? I thought. Maybe they were on a religious retreat, or maybe they were reading the scriptures, or maybe they were trying to listen to a sermon, without dozing. The stories I read did not always confirm my preconceived ideas. People were not always looking for God, instead they were minding their own business and they were surprised that God was looking for them!

I learned something else while reading: that the location of these divine/human meetings was rarely at church. Now on Sundays, people report that they’ve been inspired, or uplifted, or at least bothered by the service, but rarely did I read about a dramatic, face-to-face, one-on-one meeting. I wish that was true, considering what I do on a Sunday.

I discovered to my amazement that people do not meet God where I would have expected; like on a mountaintop, or on a religious silent retreat. They get nabbed at the office, standing at the kitchen sink, sitting at a desk, or feeding the dog. As I read, I learned that God has a different idea of where to meet people.

I always go to get my water in the middle of the day – it’s easier that way. You see, the other women of the village go in the early morning, before the sun is up and it becomes so unbearably hot. But I got tired of them shunning me, of them whispering behind my back, or scurrying away on the first sight of me (slight pause).

You see, I’m not the most popular woman in the village. Okay, that’s an understatement – most people cannot stand me (slight pause).

I’ve had five husbands. Good men, I might add. All older, though, and they have all died. People blamed me, which is rather silly, but there you go. People it seems are always looking for an excuse to blame someone else for something they don’t understand.

I live with a fellow now – a nice man, gentle and kind. We’re good friends, good companions. We’ve never really talked about marriage; it just sort of happened that one day he was living with me, and it seemed good and right. But for most people that was the last straw, and pretty much no one has said a word to me since. That’s why I gather my water in the heat of the day.

So it was in the middle of the day that I came and encountered a man sitting at the well – a Jewish man at that. I tried to ignore him and just get my water, but he began to talk to me. Of all people – a man and a Jew besides – asked me for a cup of water.

I was so taken aback I blurted out, “Why on earth would you, a Jewish man, ask me for a drink?”

"If you knew who I was," he continued, "you would ask me for some living water."

I didn't understand at first, and I noticed he had no bucket, so I pointed that out. "You don't think you're better than Jacob who gave us this well, do you?"

"I offer something else," the man continued. "I offer living water – the water that comes from God, the water that grows inside you and bubbles up and spills over in acts of love and justice. The water that leads you to eternal life."

"I'd love some of that water," I replied. I wasn't quite sure what it was, but I knew I wanted it! "Give me a drink of that, please!"

"Go get your husband," he said to me, and I was crushed. I dropped my head.

"I, I don't have a husband," I said, feeling instantly ashamed. Obviously, he was just like the others. I waited for some humiliating comment. But instead he spoke again.

"I know that," he said with a gentle smile. "It's okay"

"You must be a prophet!", I exclaimed. And I added, "we worship here in this place, but you and your people, they say we must worship God in Jerusalem."

"Some day people will come to realize that it doesn't matter where we worship God," the man said. "Some day we will realize that God is a spirit, that God is everywhere at all times. So we can worship God anywhere, and always. It doesn't matter where we are." He paused for a second, and looked straight at me. "It doesn't matter who we are," he finished.

"I know the Messiah will come some day," I said. "And things will become clear."

"I am he," the man said.

Just then, some other men approached, and they began asking him why on earth he was talking to me, and I was so overwhelmed by everything he had said, I just left my bucket and ran back into the village. But I was overwhelmed with what he had said, and I found myself stopping people, shouting at them: "You've got to come and see this man," I said, "he's amazing! He offered me living water, and he says he's the Messiah, and he says incredible things about what it is to worship God, and to be God's people!" And you know what? I don't know if it was my excitement, or just the surprise that I would dare to talk to folks, but they all seemed to want to come and hear him. And he talked for a long time. And we were changed (slight pause).

We were all changed.

So, thanks to this Samaritan woman, I've got a definition for you. Who is a Christian? A Christian (at least this Sunday) is someone who is willing to be open to the possibility that something's afoot, that the risen Christ is not only enigmatic and elusive but also flirtatious and revealing; that, even though you may not have the time or the inclination to go looking for God, God in Jesus Christ just might be looking for you.

So tomorrow folks, when you pick up a bucket, or a fork at supper, or go for a walk – keep looking over your shoulder. Something's afoot. Odd things occur. Strange, inexplicable coincidences.

This can't be the Messiah? Is he?