

The woman at the well



Colour me!



John 4:3-14

Jesus left Judea and started for Galilee again. This time he had to go through Samaria, and on his way he came to the town of Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had long ago given to his son Joseph. The well that Jacob had dug was still there, and Jesus sat down beside it because he was tired from travelling. It was midday, and after Jesus' disciples had gone into town to buy some food, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well.

Jesus asked her, "Would you please give me a drink of water?" "You are a Jew," she replied, "and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink of water when Jews and Samaritans won't have anything to do with each other?" Jesus answered, "You don't know what God wants to give you, and you don't know who is asking you for a drink. If you did, you would ask me for the water that gives life." "Sir," the woman said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this life-giving water? Our ancestor Jacob dug this well for us, and his family and animals got water from it. Are you greater than Jacob?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life."

Commentary

Jesus travelled mainly around Galilee, in the north of the country, but he went south to Jerusalem at least once a year – for the annual Passover festival – just as his family had done when he was a child. After one of these trips, he went home through the district known as Samaria, which had been settled by Jews who had intermarried with foreigners long ago. Because of this, they weren't regarded as pure Jews and were despised by the other Jews. This explains the woman's surprise that Jesus wanted to speak to her. It was also unusual for a man to speak to a woman in public like this. Jesus, it seems, was always breaking the rules and reaching out to people whom no one else cared about.

He was genuinely thirsty, of course, but the conversation soon turns into a discussion about a different sort of water that Jesus can give, which does not involve digging a well or having a bucket. He's talking about the water of eternal life, which can quench people's spiritual thirst for meaning and purpose. The woman goes on to believe in Jesus as the Saviour of the world and ends up telling everyone in her village about the man she met beside the well.

Questions

- ▶ Why was the woman so shocked that Jesus bothered to talk to her?
- ▶ In what ways is water like the gift of eternal life?
- ▶ Jesus was prepared to go where he might not be welcome. What sort of places are like this for you?
- ▶ This story shows us how to talk about faith in everyday conversation. Has something like this ever happened for you?



Visual aid

Try to find one of those tiny sponges or towels that expand rapidly when put into water. See what a difference water can make to something so small and dry, and link it to the story.



Activity idea

Construct your own well: take a long cardboard tube and make two small holes in one end, opposite each other. Thread a smooth round stick through the holes. Attach some string to a small container. Tie the other end of the string to the stick and wind it round. Now, by turning the stick, lower the container down the cardboard tube. You could try doing this over some water in a sink or bath and see if you can succeed in lifting up some water to the 'surface'.



Prayer idea

Pour some water into a bowl and use it to help you pray.

- Listen to the sound of the water as it pours: God's Spirit is waiting to be poured out on all those who turn to him.
- Feel the wetness of the water on your skin: God wants his love to clean us and refresh us every day.
- Immerse your hands in the water: God wants his love to surround us and transform us, just as our hands look and feel different under water.
- Drink some water: God wants to fill us up so that we can cope with all that lies before us every day.

Key verse

Jesus answered, "... The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life." (John 4:14)

Old Testament story link

Isaiah 32:15-20: Isaiah describes the powerful difference that water can make in the desert and likens it to the gift of God's Spirit in our lives.



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