

A flood was on its way, forcing everyone to evacuate. The police rowed up to the most pious woman in town and said, "Ma'am, you have to leave this house! People are dying out here!"

The woman replied, "No, I'm not leaving. God has always helped me before, and He will do it again." So as the water started to rise, she went to the second story of her house. Another boat came by, and the captain yelled, "Ma'am, you have to get on this boat or you're going to drown!"

The woman replied again, "No, God helped me before, and He will do it again." The water rose even higher. This time she went to the top of the roof, where a helicopter came and hovered overhead. The pilot called into his loudspeaker, "Please climb aboard, ma'am. You are going to drown!"

The woman sniffed and again replied, "God is going to save me!" But the water rose higher, and soon she drowned to death. She went to Heaven, and there she asked God, "Why didn't you save me, O Lord?" And God replied, "I did help--I sent you two boats and a helicopter!"

Last week we heard of a tormented soul who sought peace through reason – he looked for his answer in his head, but in truth found it eventually in his heart. That was Nicodemus's pathway to faith. Nicodemus, in John's telling of the story, of course represents the Jews bound up in the Law. Today John uses someone who from the margins of society to press his point that even outcast and sinners can find the peace of God and find purpose.

The Samaritan woman is seen to represent oppressed people that feature repeatedly in the Gospel: women, prostitutes and sexually immoral people generally and all kinds of outsiders, people who are unclean, infidels, foreigners... These are all close to the heart of Jesus.

The Samaritan woman has no name – shall we call her that?

No-name didn't even know she had a need. She was getting by day-to-day and life was not easy for her. Although she didn't know what she needed, the Lord knew, and so He spoke to her on her level.

The story begins by Jesus showing himself as a person in need: tired, hungry and thirsty; a reminder humanity Jesus. He asks help from a person he was supposed, according to convention, to avoid. He asks her to quench his thirst.

Bruce Springsteen sings in his song *Hungry Heart*

Everybody's got a hungry heart

Everybody's got a hungry heart

Lay down your money and you play your part

Everybody's got a hungry heart

**Everybody needs a place to rest
 Everybody wants to have a home
 Don't make no difference what nobody says
 Ain't nobody like to be alone**

**Everybody's got a hungry heart
 Everybody's got a hungry heart
 Lay down your money and you play your part
 Everybody's got a hungry heart**

There is a yearning deep in every heart for forgiveness and hope, a sense that our best days are not all behind us, that God has not given up on us even if we have in some ways given up on ourselves. It is a craving for the peace of God for which Jesus in his humanity thirsted with a passion.

No-name is very surprised by Jesus' approach to her, and understandably takes him literally: there is no bucket! But Jesus is talking about different water! Those who drink it will never be thirsty again and it gives eternal life. Again, literally, the woman wants this water that lasts forever.

A tough, cynical, morally broken woman, careful to avoid the gaze of others, hears a man asking for her help. She is possibly the most broken woman in the whole Gospel story, and in all likelihood, is the subject of scorn and derision. She turns toward Him. Jesus needs water, yes, but more than that He wants to give her what **she** needs—mercy, that will well up from her depths and satisfy her forever.

The water that Jesus promises is the Love of God "*poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*". It is not just a question of a ritual washing or immersing and saying magic words but of a real drinking in of that Spirit. The spirit quenches our thirst, not by removing our desire for God's presence but by continually satisfying it: and the more we have, the more we crave!

Like our spiritual ancestors in the wilderness, when we are rendered anxious and desperate by crises – fire, flood, famine, joblessness, homelessness, lack of money, the terrors of war – we test God by asking him to respond to our concrete, specific needs. Like them, we need a

somewhat sturdier trust. The Good News is, of course, that he provides what is needed without our anxious grumbling, without our desperate angry shouting. In the endless outpouring of his generosity, God gives to all his creation what is needed for its life, without any coercion on our part. Our hungers, wants and needs are met because of God's reliable generosity.

The New Testament stories of Jesus are all framed in such a way that this amazing, tried-and-true, reliable generosity of God is seen in all Jesus' activities and in the way Jesus lived and died. Jesus's love for us is the stuff of life. The God who speaks to this woman of Samaria at the well in the heat of the day, is the same God who supported our dusty ancestors' journey through the wilderness, with manna from heaven to eat and water from rocks to drink.

Notice how Jesus does not look down upon her as the others do. He calls no attention to her brokenness. Instead, he acknowledges his own brokenness. He is tired. He is thirsty. Reminding us today of his very last words on the cross: "I thirst."

What Jesus is seeking here is someone who shares his thirst. His thirst is a thirst for peace, for shalom which, properly understood is a thirst for justice and healing for all people, especially people like this Samaritan woman. Most of all, Jesus thirsts for dignity and respect for all people. Not some people. Not a lot of people. All people.

By reaching out to her from his own need he gives her dignity and respect—there is something she can do for him. Jesus gives her identity and purpose. Suddenly something new, something real, wells up inside of her. It is a new confidence, a new spirit. And from this new spirit her real thirst is revealed. The water at the bottom of Jacob's well is no good for this kind of thirst - thirsts for real life, authentic life. Jesus gives it to her without cost and without condition. She, who had no life and no purpose, but only heartache, pain, and shame, is suddenly given the gift of eternal life with Jesus who is revealed to her as God's own anointed one.

This story asks us if we are willing to reveal our brokenness to these others and to him. Later in the Gospel we will hear the disciples sounding so utterly unlike this woman. They all jockey for positions of power and

prestige in his kingdom and in his church. They sound so much like us. And yet, what does he ask them? Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? He asks us to consider our thirst. He invites us to acknowledge our real thirst so he can give us the living water that wells up inside of us.

When Jesus looked on that woman, he saw something more than anyone else could see. He saw more than her history of divorces, her strong will or her propensity to gossip. He saw a woman of courage and of truth. He saw someone who had the potential to really grasp who he was and to share that with others. Maybe it was her misfortune that made her able to see him as the Son of God. He saw, not her brokenness, but her evangelistic capability.

WE cannot possibly know who God would accept and who God would reject. We cannot see what God sees. We cannot know the depths and the strength of those who seem to have lost everything. How can we judge one another? We cannot even seem to see our own selves clearly.

It is not just God who is unknown to us. It is not just God who is a great and powerful mystery. It is us. We do not understand ourselves. We do not know all that we can be, all that God hopes and dreams for us to become. God wants us to grow into the full stature of Christ. When the world tears you down, do not believe it. They do not know you. Only God can see who you really are.

Sean McConnell wrote the song *Somewhere Beautiful* about people who seem lost: it has this chorus:

**No one knows that there's more
Beyond these dead skies and all these filthy streets
Take my hand and let me pull you
Out of the blindness of your weary soul
To somewhere beautiful
To somewhere beautiful**

Pain and brokenness was left at Jacob's well and out of the living water a new child of God arose.