



Central Methodist Mission

As Jacob's Well

Central Methodist Mission

Together for God. Saam vir die Here. Sikunye KuThixo.

In John's Gospel chapter 4 we find a beautiful, beautiful encounter between Jesus and a woman.

Jesus was on his way from Judea to Galilee. The outcast territory of Samaria lay between the two towns. Most Jews of that time would have opted to walk the long way round keeping well clear of Samaria, but not Jesus – Jesus refused to obey the Group Areas Act of his day that had been entrenched by over 700 years of Jewish / Samaritan Apartheid.

Jesus arrived in the Samaritan city of Sychar and found a seat at Jacob's well, for we read that he was tired out from his journey. Just then a Samaritan woman arrived at the well to draw water – we are told it was about noon. At first we are surprised that anyone would be drawing water during the noonday heat, but later in the story we discover that the most probable reason for this is that due to the woman's rather checked relationship history with men she would not have been welcome to collect water in the early morning or evening with the other so called "respectable" women of the town. She was on her own. She was an outcast.

But amazingly we find Jesus starting up a conversation with her. In this we see that Jesus breaks through three significant barriers: her race, her gender and her morality. Each one was enough to stop any other Jewish male of the time from even looking at her never mind speaking to her.

Jesus goes further – he asks her for a drink of water. **Jesus finds use for everyone. None of us is too "far gone" to be of use to Jesus.** She however is trapped by the prejudice and racism of her time reminding Jesus that Jews and Samaritans do not share the same cups. Sadly she was not the last person who allowed racism to get in the way of her relationship with Jesus. We must take note that, **prejudice and racism leave Jesus thirsty!**

Jesus then goes on to inform the woman that if she knew who was asking her for a drink she would have asked him and he would have given her living water. She replies by commenting on the fact that he doesn't have a bucket and due to the depth of the well it would be impossible for him to give her such water. **Like the woman we too can be prone to respond to the promises of Jesus by listing all the reasons why his promises won't be realized.** Instead of having her heart opened and her imagination stretched and her soul watered by trusting Jesus' word she looks for ways to restrict Jesus. She does so in a tone of "let's be practical about this!" **Sadly being practical too often gets the better of being faithful.**

Where do you get that living water – the woman asks – are you greater than our ancestor Jacob? She is stuck in the accepted cultural understandings of her day about the source of life. **No different to many of us who have bought into the cultural myth of our day that having more and more material things will give us life.**

According to Jesus, the likes of Jacob's well has its limitations – ultimately it doesn't satisfy the real depths of the soul – and there is a danger that we become addictively dependent on it. While the water Jesus promises will become like a spring inside a person enabling new and lasting life. Hearing this, the woman admits that she is tired of coming to this well and she asks Jesus for this living water that he is speaking about.

In response to her request for living water, Jesus tells her to go and call her husband. She replies by telling Jesus that she has no husband and Jesus affirms that she has spoken the truth. Jesus

also helps her expand this truth of hers by stating that she has had five husbands. **According to Jesus the “bucket” we need to use to draw the living water that he is offering us is the “bucket” of truth.** Jesus invites us, as he invited the woman, to be truthful about our lives and living. **It is not an easy thing to be truthful and the good news (and rather terrifying news) is that Jesus will help us to expand the truth we speak.**

At this moment she recognizes Jesus as a prophet and proceeds to enter into a conversation with Jesus about where and how to worship – once again exposing her cultural entrappedment. Please note that Jesus has been speaking with the woman for some time and promising her living water all the while she is still unaware of who he really is. **This means that Jesus does not only promise living water to those who know him or who have faith in him!** It is only in the 26th verse that Jesus in fact reveals himself to her. **How wonderful to know that Jesus has conversations with all people – all day – every day – everywhere whether we know him by name or not.**

They are **convicting conversations** that introduce us to his needs as well as the truth of our lives.

Just then the disciples come back from their shopping (very telling for our age!) and we read that they are astonished. Astonished probably that Jesus has crossed the three barriers mentioned above. They too are trapped by their own cultural understandings of what is accepted and proper. Note that the one thing that the disciples don't do is go over and introduce themselves to the woman and make her feel welcome. **Prejudice and racism excludes people.**

The woman leaves her bucket – her wooden bucket that is – and runs back to the city with her bucket of truth in her hand. She left the city earlier in the day an ashamed outcast but she returns now as a passionate messenger of good news. **Her time spent in conversation with Jesus has empowered and healed her.** She becomes the first mega-evangelist. Moved by her testimony the people of the city invite Jesus to stay among them for a few days and in so doing the Jew and Samaritan divide crumbles.

And all this took place at Jacob's well. Now do you remember who Jacob was? He was Isaac and Rebekah's son and the younger twin of his brother Esau. Jacob and Esau spent their entire lives at odds with each other – with Jacob deviously getting the better of Esau at every opportunity. **Jacob it must be said was a lying, stealing and conniving character.** In other words he did not embody too much of the fruit of the Spirit!

And yet it was at Jacob's well (of all places!) that an outcast woman had a watershed moment with Jesus.

Sometimes when I think of my life or the Church's life as an institution I think it often resembles the lying, stealing and conniving character of Jacob. It is then easy to question and doubt what good we can be for Jesus. Yet the promise of this scripture is that regardless of what I think of myself or of the Church, Jesus still visits. Jesus still takes a seat and strikes up a caring yet convicting conversation with whoever comes by.

Jesus needs you and I, no matter how Jacob-like our lives may be! Jesus longs for us to be a meeting place where others can meet him and be refreshed.

As Church, we are called to be a place where people can meet Jesus – hear his needs – get over our prejudice – face the truth of our lives – drink and be filled – discover who Jesus really is – be healed enough to joyfully re-enter the communities we have been rejected from and finally intrigue others enough with the testimony of our lives to move them to invite Jesus to stay among them for a few days? A place that will always know its limitations and be wary of the danger of people becoming so attached to it that we fail to recognise Jesus as the true source of living water in our midst.