

Meeting Jesus at our Well
The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
The Third Sunday in Lent, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary
February 24, 2008

A group of youth, with adult chaperones, just completed our 30 Hour Famine yesterday. We started on Friday, and continued all the way through Saturday until dinnertime. During this time, we were allowed to consume water, juices, and certain other beverages—but no food. It was somewhat difficult, though unlike our brothers and sisters in impoverished countries, we had activities and entertainment to distract us. But the constant diet of fluids certainly had its impact—for when we finally broke the fast, I overheard one young participant say that she wasn't going to drink anything for a long time.

I doubt, however, that you would hear that said of anyone living in the Palestinian region during Jesus' time—or even today. There, water is precious; to have an ample supply of water was, and is, to be considered rich. And back in Jesus' day it was not so easily gained as turning on the tap—one needed to go to the well and draw it—and then carry it back home. It was a daily task, an important task—one not brushed aside or put off until another time. Even if you came to the well later in the day, like the Samaritan woman we meet today, you still needed to come.

Most women came early in the day, when it was cooler, so that the heat would not burden them as they traveled home with their heavy load of daily water. It became a gathering time, a time to socialize. However, it was not so for our nameless Samaritan woman—for she came at noontime. Married multiple times, currently living in non-marital relationship, she was an outcast among the respectable women of the town. She came when no one was around to avoid the pain of the cold shoulder, the whispered comments, the judgmental glances.

Imagine then, to her discomfort, that she was far from alone. There was a strange man sitting by the well—a Jew, no less. Knowing that the bounds of propriety prevented him from

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speaking to her, or even acknowledging her, she went about her business. So imagine her surprise when Jesus struck up a conversation with her, and even asked her for a drink. She was a Samaritan, he a Jew; she a woman of questionable reputation, he an unrelated male. Such interchange—particularly one as long and involved as this one—is unthinkable. Clearly, the bounds of propriety had not only been breached, but nearly shattered. And yet, drawn by her curiosity of this living water of which he spoke, she remained. No matter how the conversation may have confused her, or even made her uncomfortable, she continued in it, trying to seek answers to her questions.

At the last, her persistence was rewarded—for Jesus revealed his identity as the Messiah. Overwhelmed by this, and perhaps seeking to flee the glares of Jesus’ returning disciples, she left that most precious of possessions—her water jar—and turned back toward town. The water was important, yes; but she had just discovered something—or someone—more so. Emboldened by her discovery, bursting with a new though tentative faith, she entered her city and sought out those who may normally seek to avoid her—to share the good news. Indeed, without realizing it, she had been given the gift of living water, which overflowed from her to all those she met and shared this news of Jesus’ arrival. The outcast had become an evangelist; the one who thirsted after water abandoned her jar and instead became a new vessel for the kingdom of God.

We too are met by the well by Jesus. We go about our lives, never knowing where those God-encounters will turn up. So much of the time, we seek to turn away, to draw our cloak of personal protection and insulation tighter around us. We nip those confusing, uncomfortable God-exchanges in the bud. We choose not to be persistent, not to follow this vulnerable road of discomfort to its full revelation—a new life filled with the living water of God’s great love and

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mercy. We hold tight to our jar, sticking with what we know; and often miss that opportunity to break down the barriers that divide us and allow us to come to Jesus—together.

So the next time you turn on the tap, think of the woman at the well. And know that Jesus waits by your well, so that you too may be filled with the living water of his grace.

Amen.