

1st July 2018
Jesus meets the Woman at the Well
John 4:5-30, 39-42

The recent wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle caught popular imagination because of their genuine, loving relationship. And media publications thrived on it for a few weeks following, changing their emphasis on relationships to those succeeding rather than those failing.

Looking back, we value places where we have lived by the people whom we have known more than the surroundings. This is unsurprising as we're made to function in relationship – with God, with families and in communities.

No surprise again that many compelling parts of the Bible are based on conversation and relationship. Typical of these is the story in John 4 of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

- It is a story of a personal encounter into which the Samaritan woman is increasingly drawn.
- It is a story which breaks social and religious conventions of the day.
- It is a story that begins with the everyday and ends with the everlasting; reminding us of the spiritual dimension intertwined in everyday life.
- It is a story that begins with a passing thirst and ends with an offer of eternal refreshment.
- It is a story which reveals the insight, compassion and persistence of the Lord Jesus, and the fascination of the woman to whom he is speaking.
- It is a story which later led others, and leads us, to ask more about Jesus, and the nature and potential of life lived with him.
- It is a story above all which shows Jesus, who quenches human thirst and meets human need – completely.
- It is a story with a powerful final twist, 4:25-26,

The woman said, "I know that Christ is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." And Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he."

To quote C S Lewis, *Surely it must be worth finding out more about him – as much as we can.*

What takes place in John 4 is a masterpiece of conversation with life-changing outcomes:

Firstly, Jesus' dependence creates relationship

4:7 Woman comes to draw water and Jesus, weary from journeying in the midday sun, asks her for a drink. He places himself in her debt.

Secondly, Jesus' boldness brushes tradition aside

She says, 4:9, *You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?* Tradition was that a Jew would be ceremonially unclean if he used a drinking vessel handled by a Samaritan. It doesn't take an Equality Act to see the prejudice!

Thirdly, Jesus' directness gets to the point

He seems to ignore her question as of little importance, or he wouldn't have asked for a cup of water she would touch.

Instead, he says 4:10, *If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.*

This begs two unavoidable questions:

- What is the gift of God?
- Who is Jesus?

And she has three questions of her own!

- *How can you draw water without a bucket?!*
- *Where can you get this living water?*
- *Are you greater than the patriarch Jacob who dug the well and left it for us?*

(As an aside, it is interesting to see the historical reference to Jacob's well, validating the historicity of this encounter by reference to an ancient site.)

Jesus' answer touches all the questions, 4:13-14:

- *Everyone who drinks this (well) water will be thirsty again. Fact.*
- *Whoever drinks the water I will give will never be thirsty again. Contrast.*

- *The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Meaning?*

Looking back at Jesus' life and teaching makes things clearer, but at that moment, not fully understanding what he meant, the woman said, 4:15, *Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.* However, Jesus wasn't offering any kind of 'magic' water. And she could not have the gift without the Giver.

Writer Selwyn Hughes said about relationships, and marriage in particular, that we should not expect to receive everything we need as human beings from just one other person, be it from even a husband or wife. The sense of security, of significance and of self-worth for which human beings strive can only truly be known in relationship with God himself. If we expect these in full from another person, we will be disappointed and we will place an inappropriate burden of expectation on that person.

In contrast, Jesus can bear the weight of our need and meet the deepest longing of our lives – a longing for something real, freeing and permanent. He said, 4:14, *Whoever drinks the water I will give will never be thirsty again. The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

So we discover the living water is the gift of life, eternal. The giver is God in Christ himself. It's hard to grasp, but undoubtedly what Jesus meant was fullness of life, everlasting life, eternal life, life at peace with God, life at peace with yourself, life at peace with others especially those who share this same gift – a completely satisfying, thirst-quenching experience of life as our Maker intends it to be.

Never struck gold? You have now!

William Goldman *Life is pain. Anyone who says otherwise is selling something.*

Novelist Martin Amis *Life has no shape at all. It is simply one thing after another.*

C.f. Jesus, John 10:10,

I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness.

He pictures it here as *'a spring of water in us welling up to eternal life'*.

It was and is deeply satisfying to encounter Christ. The woman said, *He told me everything I ever did* – and he still went on talking to me.

And it is extraordinary to discover Christ's continuing acceptance of us in an ongoing relationship with him.

The woman wanted to put off a response! 4:25, *When the Christ comes, he will explain everything to us.* But Jesus would not let her put it off! He said "*I who speak to you am he.*"

Mad, bad or God? She must make her choice because Jesus' persistence led her to the point of faith and commitment.

And we too must choose. *Now* is a good time. *Today.* If not now, when? God is always here to give us eternal life. It has always been an undeserved gift of grace, offered to all who will accept it.

Lee and Clare's water baptisms today mark their choice of Christ, dying to an old life and rising to new life with him.

For them, and for us, this is an opportunity to open ourselves to God to be met by his Spirit, to be filled anew with Him, to know more and more of the fullness of life which is his gift and will for us.

Let's take a moment of quiet now to come to Christ, to encounter him and to receive him anew.