

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” 2 (although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized), 3 he left Judea and started back to Galilee. 4 But he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” 13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” 15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” 17 The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” 19 The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” 27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” 30 They left the city and were on their way to him. 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent

you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” (*New Revised Standard Updated Edition*)

My water jar was practically new. It was a Roman red-glazed clay jug. There was rouletting all around the rim, and a long, narrow neck that gracefully joined a thick concave base. It had good, sturdy handles. It was decorated with darker red bands and a black, stylized-floral pattern. It was smooth, and shiny, and beautiful. Families in Sychar, Samaria, where I live, usually buy a new water jar about once a year. Every time I get a new water jar, going to the well for water seems novel somehow, a welcome break, in my everyday routine.

One hot day, when the sun was directly overhead, I made my third trip to the well. I was hoping it wouldn't be so crowded. Maybe, in the heat of the day, most people would choose to wait a while, and return to the well for more water in the evening, before supper. Then while others waited in line at the well, I would already be home and finished with my chore. So I set off, slipping my arm through one handle of my new Roman red water jar. Hugging it close to my body, I happily made the so-familiar trip to the well.

But, my familiar trip ended in an unfamiliar scene at the well. Sitting, or actually, practically lounging, right there, next to the well, was a man, a Jew. A very tired-looking Jew. He looked hot and thirsty. I pretended not to notice him. After all, being a Jew, he wasn't allowed to talk to unknown women. I unhooked my arm from my Roman red jar, and picked up the rope from the side of the well. I looped it around the jar, tied it securely through both handles, and carefully began to lower it down the side of the well, careful not to chip the red glaze on its way down.

“Give me a drink.” The Jewish stranger requested, quietly (and surprisingly) respectfully. I continued to lower the jar. Working slowly, watching down the

darkness of the well, looking out for my new jar. I spoke softly, careful not to make eye contact.

“How is it, that you, a Jewish man, is asking me, a woman - from Samaria, for a drink of water?” Jews and Samaritans didn't exactly get along anymore... although we had come from the same Hebrew roots - we now had deep differences in our beliefs and our worship of God.

He didn't answer. I felt the jar rest in the deep well and let out a little more rope. The jar gently rolled to its side and the water began to seep into the rouletted rim. As the water filled the concave base, the filling jar slowly righted itself with the weight of the water, and when it was heavy full, I gently pulled the jar up, careful not to scrape it along the rough stone walls. He watched me untie the rope from the handles. Averting my eyes, I approached him. He held out his dusty hands, and I poured cool water over them. He rinsed, and then cupped his hands, caught the water and drank.

He looked up at me. Our eyes met. And he said, “If you knew who I was, you'd have asked me for a drink. I would have given you living water.”

Living Water? I'm looking at this guy, with nothing but the shirt on his back and sandals on his feet and I said, “Well, you don't even have a bucket. Why would I ask you for water?” I felt kind of bad, this kind Jewish man, after centuries of hostility and the deep prejudices our respective cultures held against one another, he was actually talking to a woman, breaking all sorts of rules. And I was challenging him.

But he didn't flinch. I needed to smooth things over a bit, to reach out to this Jewish man, who was respectful of me. “Where can I get this living water?” I asked. I pointed out in my own way, our common ground. - Because this well, is for all intents and purposes, is Jacob's well (the Hebrew Jacob). We both share the same Hebrew history. And wells run deep in our history. Jacob met Rachel at a well at 12 noon, over 1900 years ago.

Then he told me to go and get my husband. I told him that I have no husband, and he said you are right, you've had five, and the one you are with now is not your husband. I knew what he meant. He didn't mean literally, for indeed, as I said, I am not married. He was talking about our history. Our mutual history. In the ancient

writings we call Kings, the story is told of the national history of the Samaritan people. In 721 BC, the Assyrians conquered our region and brought colonists from five foreign nations into Samaria. We intermarried with the five nations, five husbands, with new religions which led us to deviate from other traditional Jewish faith practices. And the sixth man? The one we are with but not married to? That would be Rome, who is colonizing our nation right now. We live with them, but we do not intermarry with them like we did under the Assyrians. He knew the colonial history of Samaria, and now here we were at the well. Jesus the bridegroom, 'wooing' Samaria to accept him and become a New Israel, through him, the Living Water. He was offering us, the Samaritan people, Living Water, life abundant, a reuniting with Jewish Israel.

Since he opened the door to our theological and religious differences, I asked him about the theology and practices that have divided our people so deeply. And by the time we were done talking, I was convinced that this was no ordinary man. He claimed to be the expected Messiah, the one revealed to Moses in the burning bush. And I was beginning to believe him.

When the man's friends and followers came, bringing him food, I was so excited to go home to tell my people all about Living Water. I couldn't wait to tell my family and neighbors about this Savior who brings abundant life. This man claiming that he was Savior not just for the Jews, but through the Jews, he is the Messiah that we were all expecting. I was so excited, that I left my new, Roman red water jar and ran all the way home. As I ran away, I could hear someone say, "We left our fishing nets to catch people - and she left her water jar to share the Good News of Living Water."

I ran into the city and told everyone about what had happened. At first everyone was just excited about Jesus because I was. But after a few days, many of my people believed in him after their own experience with him. By the end of his stay with us, the Samaritan people all developed their own relationship with Jesus, and believed in him or not, based on their own experience.

What a day that was for me! Having a Jewish man engage with me in serious theological conversation, and me being an evangelist to my entire city. And all of us

finding out together that God is much bigger than all the rules of our respective faith traditions. That God is above our rules and understanding, and has a broader, fuller divine picture. None of us, no one... is excluded from God. Living Water, the kind of nourishment that quenches the deepest spiritual thirst, is for us all. "People who drink of Living Water will never be thirsty, for the gift of God fills our whole being and runs over, penetrating every part of human existence." Living Water, is for each of us. Jesus is for all of us.

About this sermon/monologue

Many years ago, in the season of Lent, a friend and colleague of mine who was the only other member of my graduating class from seminary who took a solo ministry call out of seminary, worked with me to create a series of monologues, I believe for the season of Lent. She wrote half of them and I wrote half of them. For the life of me, I do not know who wrote this monologue. It may have been Tici Truly, then Theresa Wood-Burgess. In any case I want to give her credit for her long distance partnership in my first six years of ministry.

*Quoted in the monologue and significantly influencing the monologue is:
Frances Taylor Gench. 2007. Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John.
Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.*