

“Meet Me at the Well”

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Genesis 24:34, 37-40, 42-48, 58-61; John 4:3-10

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How many of you remember fetching water from a well? I am not so old but I remember when I was young at the cottage there was a well with a pump. Sometimes you had to prime the pump — put water into the pump to get it to work. Other cottagers would come and you'd bump into them at the well. But after a while they decided the water at the well wasn't good enough and it was closed. At that point we hauled water from an outside tap at a nearby house until we dug a well of our own and had running water in the cottage. What a luxury! I remember we met a girl who lived in a big house nearby and they had a pool in a greenhouse. We came running home to tell our parents about this luxury of an indoor pool and my dad said to us: “That's nothing. *We have hot and cold running water!*”

What a gift. It's so easy to take for granted the gift of clean running water. So much of the world still has to fetch and haul water. There is something about a well. There is still folklore around a wishing well. Wells are critical to life. They are deep and cold and refreshing; having a good one is a treasure and you never know who you will meet at the well.

About 4,000 years ago a servant came to a well, hoping to find not just water, but Mrs. Right.

Let's listen to a little of his story: (presented in dramatic format by Pastor Kim)

*Let me tell you about a mission I was on. Truthfully it seemed like a hair-brained idea, but I understood where it was coming from and much more important, **who** it was coming from, so I just did what a servant is supposed to do and that is listen and obey and hope for the best.*

Abraham asked me to find a wife for his son Isaac. Not just any son, but his only son by his dear wife Sarah. Sarah died the spring before. We all knew it was coming, heck, she was no spring chicken when she had Isaac, but Abraham's heart was broken. And the match making—that's how things are done around here—was now up to Abraham. Abe didn't want a local girl to be his daughter-in-law; it had to be someone from back home. Abraham did tell me that if I went and didn't find someone I was released of my obligation, but he already had a broken heart and he was too old to do this trek on his own, so I felt the weight of his hopes on me.

I really wasn't sure how I was going to do this. Isaac wasn't even coming with me. I had to go on my own and see if I could talk some maiden into leaving everything she knew to travel with me to a life ahead that held God knows what. How do you talk someone into that?

I was afraid on the one hand of finding no one, and on the other hand of finding the wrong one.

As I approached the village the first thing I looked for was the well. I knew I was going to need water and so were the camels. I didn't have a bucket and drawing water was what the women did. So I was dependent on the hospitality of the locals. I gotta tell you, I don't like being dependent on others but sometimes being dependent is a gift—remember that. Strangely, others tend to be more drawn to us when we are weak and in need than when we are strong and need nothing.

My need for water was the starting point. I had been wondering how on earth I would pick out and find the right woman for Isaac. A thought popped into my head that if when I asked for water, if she not only offered to give me, a stranger, some water but also offered to water my camels, that's how I would know she was the one.

As I say, it popped into my head. I don't think I chose that test — I think it chose me. Abraham said to me "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful." I couldn't see any angels, but I know I was not alone. Maybe it was the Lord who put that thought into my head. It seemed like a good thought and in the same way that I trust my master Abraham, how could I not trust the Lord who is good, who is faithful and who walks before me?

Of course, there was another little voice in my head that scoffed at the idea. Watering weary camels is no small feat. It takes a lot to quench the thirst of a thirsty camel. This wasn't a simple gesture of hospitality: "Do you care for a cup of tea, and would you like a cookie with that?" No, this was hard work. Abraham wanted a girl from his family, from his brother Laban's family. While I did not think Laban was as wealthy as Abraham had become, nevertheless, unless things had drastically changed, his was a family of means, and his was a family that would have servants, many servants to fetch water. So I knew the idea that a woman worthy of my master Isaac might also be a woman who would jump at the idea of watering camels, was absurd.

Listen and obey. That is the role of a servant. I am the servant of Abraham and I have learned to obey and to trust him. He is not perfect, but Abraham has been a good master and so I follow and obey. But even more, I am a servant of The Most High God. The Lord is good, the Lord is perfect, and

so if that funny thought, that idea of her offering to water the camels actually came from the Lord, why would I not listen and obey? Why would I not trust?

Still it felt like a risk. Listen and obey, there is always a risk. In the end I am nothing if I don't trust my Lord.

You know how it turned out. I came to the well in need. I came to the well afraid but trusting that God is good. At that well I not only quenched my thirst but accomplished what my master sent me off to do. I brought home a beautiful, humble, willing and adventurous woman named Rebecca.

It's a good thing I was thirsty. You never know who or what you'll find when you come to the well.

Rebecca willingly went with the servant and was married to Isaac. Together they had Jacob and Essau. Jacob who would be renamed "Israel" and who would have twelve sons — the twelve tribes of Israel.

2,000 years later another man came to a well in a foreign country—it was the well that Jacob built—and this man too asked for a drink from a woman. This too was an encounter that radically changed that woman's life forever.

Let's listen to part of her story: (again presented in dramatic format)

It's brutal to haul water at noon. No one in their right mind does that. But I can handle the pain in my body a whole lot better than the pain in my heart. The women who come here in the morning hate me. They either ignore me or openly talk about me. At noon I am all alone at Jacob's well. It's better that way. I like being alone.

There was one day when I was going to the well in the middle of the day and I saw that someone was there, which was really weird. It was a man. The only thing worse than seeing a woman at the well was seeing a man. I almost turned around, but I thought to myself, I haven't walked this far in this crazy heat to be scared by some man, and I needed the water. Besides, he looked pretty harmless. Ha! Little did I know! When I got closer I realized he was a Jew, which is even more strange, because they usually walk miles out of their way so they don't have to walk through my country, Samaria. The Jews hate Samaritans and well... the feeling is pretty much mutual.

While I was still wondering why he was there, without even looking at me he said "Give me a drink". I couldn't believe it. He must have been desperate. But he didn't look so desperate. It's bad enough to walk through our country, but most Jews would rather die of thirst than drink from

something that a Samaritan has touched, let alone a Samaritan woman. I looked at the ground and said: "But you're a Jew and you know darn well I'm a Samaritan...so why are you asking me for a drink?" Then he looked at me. I could feel his eyes on me... but not in a bad way. I think he was surprised I said anything. He looked at me and said something like: "If you had any idea who I am, then you'd be asking **me** for water, and I would give you living water". I didn't know what the heck kind of game he was playing at. He didn't even have a bucket. I asked him if he thought he was better than Jacob who built this well—Jacob gave us water. Who did he think he was, anyway?

So he says to me something like: "If you drink from this water you'll be thirsty again. But if you drink from the water that I give, you will never be thirsty. My water is like a spring of water inside you forever." I didn't know what to think. He looked so serious, and wouldn't we all love not to have to haul water, especially in this heat! So I said, half joking, "Sir --- give me this water so I don't have to come here anymore". Then he says to me: "Go call your husband". So I told him: "I don't have a husband". Well, it is the truth. Then he said...[getting emotional] "I know. You have had 5 husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband".

I can't remember what I said next. I said something, but I can't remember what. My head was just spinning. He knew me. He knew all about me. He knew me, and yet he was talking to me. That's when I really looked at him. I looked him in the eyes. Everyone else who knew of me-- except my mother-- looked at me like I was nothing or worse than nothing. But he wasn't looking down at me. He looked like he really cared about me. A crazy thought jumped into my head. I don't know where it came from. But I all of the sudden I thought **this is the Messiah, you know, the chosen one from God. The one we've been waiting for to save us. I knew it!** Who else could know these things about me? Who else would know these things? And . . . care about me?

When his friends came to the well, I just left my water jar and ran back to town. Who cares about the water from that well — there was something so much better there! You know, I've spent my whole life avoiding most people, but I just started telling everyone I saw about him. The Messiah was here at Jacob's well! They thought I was nuts; but that's what they thought anyway, so what did it matter? And you know lots of people went out to the well just to see what was going on, and some of them saw something like what I saw in Jesus.

There's a group of us who experienced something incredible that day, and we meet together regularly now. I left the guy I was living with. He wasn't

right for me anyway. I don't feel so alone anymore because of this group, they're like family. But I also don't feel alone because of him. Jesus left for Jerusalem, but I somehow feel like he's still here with me. I feel so much closer to God because of him.

You know what I've been thinking about lately? He needed me. The Chosen one of God needed me that day. I mean he really was tired and thirsty and he really needed to drink—thank God for that! —but I also think he needed me to lead others to the well.

I hope you meet Jesus too. When you do, ask him for some living water. I know that sounds stupid, but trust me -- when you're really thirsty -- when you're desperate -- it doesn't sound so stupid. It is so amazing. I have never felt so alive in all my life.

There you have it: two encounters at a well. We are so blessed not to have to walk miles to a well every day, so blessed to have clean, seemingly endless water flowing through the taps in our homes. Water is such a gift, and we should never take that gift for granted. But God led each of those four people to the well for more than just water. The Lord led them to the well to give them a life beyond anything they had ever imagined possible. Another 2,000 years has gone by and still we are being invited to come to the well.

If you think you need water for your body to live, even more you need the water for your soul. Jesus is living water. That living water will fill you with peace, joy and love. Wouldn't you walk miles if you knew that you could get a full bucket of peace, joy and love? I would. You don't need to walk miles, but you do need to meet Jesus somewhere and sometime. Listen for God's leading. If you listen, he will lead you to the right people, the right place, the right time — and you will be filled to overflowing.

Thanks be to God. Amen.