

Jesus: Give me a drink.

Woman: How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?

Jesus: 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.

Woman: Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?

Jesus: Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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.

Woman: Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.

Jesus: Go, call your husband, and come back.

Woman: I have no husband.

Jesus: you are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!

Woman: Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.

Jesus: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Woman: I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.

Jesus: I am he, the one who is speaking to you.

Woman: Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?

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OK. So right off the bat with this dialogue, before we try to figure out what is going on here, there are some things we need to know.

First, when Jesus talks about living water, he's not talking about coffee.

Second, the woman at the well, despite having had five husbands, is not a prostitute, nor is she promiscuous. We can be sure of this because such a situation was plausible for a woman in Jesus' day. It wasn't ideal, but it happened. Further, Jesus doesn't forgive her. There is no "Go and sin no more." Having had five husbands was not something she could control; it was something that happened *to* her. Remember that marriage had little to do with sex, and nothing at all to do with love. Marriage was an economic contract between two men negotiating for the daughter of one to become the wife of the other. A woman whose husband died or who was divorced by her husband and had no sons had no means to support herself except to find another husband. It is possible that the woman was barren, giving her husbands cause for divorce or abandonment. Whatever the reason, in this conversation, Jesus finds no fault with her; he only uses her situation to show his identity.

Third, everything about this woman is wrong. John tells this story shortly after the story of Nicodemus. It is held up over against the story of Nicodemus, and there are striking comparisons. Everything about Nicodemus is right, and everything about this woman is wrong.

1. She's a woman.

2. She's a Samaritan. Jews did not share things in common with Samaritans. Samaritans were Jews who weren't Jewish enough for the "real" Jews.

3. She's at the well at noon. Which means she's an outcast in her village. The women went to the well in the morning and the evening. The well belonged to the men during the day, so something drastic drove her to the well then. Perhaps the men were the lesser of two evils, since the women probably shunned her for her marital status.

4. She's talking to a man unaccompanied. Shocking.

5. She's a bit of a pariah. Even if it was conceivable, normal even, having 5 husbands did not make a woman popular. She would have been one of those "widows and orphans" Jesus was so concerned about. She was a drain on society, an unproductive member of the community. A burden.

6. She's brazen in her questions. And her responses. This typical challenge/riposte conversation was normal between men, but not with a woman. Women were not supposed to engage in thoughtful, educational, or theological conversation.

But the most striking difference between this unnamed woman at the well and the almost embarrassingly *right* Nicodemus is that, though both take Jesus literally at first, the woman at the well *gets it* fairly quickly. Nicodemus, for all his education and training and maleness and rightness, never does get it.

So the woman is an outcast, is *wrong*, in every possible way. But Jesus accepts her, converses with her, challenges her, speaks to her like an equal.

How does God speak to you through this conversation? (It might be different for each of us...). If we take Jesus' example as the main thing in this story, then perhaps God is reminding

us not to presume to judge another person based on their religion, their gender, their lifestyle, their poverty, their position in society, or anything else.

But if we put ourselves in this conversation honestly, we are not Jesus. But we aren't the woman at the well, either. We are Nicodemus.

We are the keepers of the law, the *right* ones. We are the in-crowd. But as the in-crowd, somehow, we decide to accuse when Jesus calls us to offer kindness. We demand others to be like us when Jesus calls us to serve. We deny others when Jesus calls us to share. We exclude when Jesus calls us to gather.

And when we see our sin, when we see that even in our religion we have embodied that sin, then we cry out for that living water, "Give me a drink!"

And Jesus comes, and drenches us in that life-giving water. Water that becomes in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. Water given to you, water that becomes part of you, water that then springs from you to others. Water of life that not only restores you but showers from you on those we have accused, demanded, denied, and excluded. Living water that sustains you, heals you, and then heals the brokenness we have created.

Jesus is here with that living water again. It comes in the reminder of your baptism. It comes in the bread and wine, his body and blood. It comes in the music and the words of worship, gracing you again with the word of God: I am he. You are mine. Go and serve and love.

Today I invite you to experience again the living water. As you come to communion, dip your finger in the baptismal water, trace the sign of the cross on your own forehead. Feel and then taste and see God's love for you in water, word, and meal.

Amen