

The woman at the well

Noontime in Israel is the hottest, brightest time of the day. People didn't usually go out at noon. That was time for people to rest. Noontime was not a time when women went to the wells to get water; they went in the cool of the morning or the evening. Water gathering was a time when women socialized and gossiped. It was an enjoyable chore because it was a time to strengthen friendships and offer and be supported by other women.

The woman of Samaria that we meet today was obviously not a typical woman. She was a woman with a past, probably one of the women who were gossiped about during the morning water run. She was a woman who probably felt ashamed of her life so she went out to the well when she expected no one to be there, no one to see her, no one to make her feel worse about herself.

But Jesus was tired and thirsty. He had been walking a long distance in the heat so he came to a well and sat down for a drink. When she discovered that there was a man there at the well she probably still felt safe. After all, men didn't speak to women in public, he was a stranger and wouldn't know of her past, and he looked like a Jew, not a Samaritan, and that meant he would definitely not speak to her or bother her. Boy was she in for a surprise.

Not only did Jesus talk to her, he needed her, he asked her to give him a drink, and he knew all about her steamy past and he accepted her as she was. In fact, it was to this sinful woman, not his disciples or the religious authorities that he first confessed who he really was, the Messiah.

He changed her life that day. She ran into town and told the townspeople about whom she had met. She didn't feel ashamed any more she was excited, whole, a new woman. She wasn't afraid of what the town folk would say or think about her. She had received the living water of grace from Jesus even though she didn't know what "living" water was. She was not afraid anymore.

And when the Disciples returned with food for Jesus to eat he was no longer hungry or thirsty he had been satisfied by his encounter with this woman. Her belief in him, her acceptance of him, and her lack of demands for healing or miracles was totally refreshing.

It is an interesting phenomenon: we come to church, we worship the Lord because we love him and need to be forgiven and accepted by the one who knows all about us, in other words, have our wells filled with his “living water”, but we often don’t realize that God needs us, too. God gets tired, hot and thirsty and when we respond to him with belief and trust, not demanding anything in return, God is satisfied and renewed. We love God not because of what he can do for us, but for the strength he gives us to go out and change our world and make it a place full of love, forgiveness, welcoming and healing.

It is at the well, not in Samaria, but at the well of our hearts where God comes and asks us for a drink. If we listen to God, in quiet, in the words of scripture, in prayer, with our mouths closed and our ears open we will hear what God wants and needs us to do to make this a better world for all people. And when we respond with love and trust and an open heart to what our Lord needs from us we will find that we, like the woman of Samaria will be filled with the “living water” of Christ.