# Well Water Guy

Readings: John 4:1-42

I love taking weddings and getting to know couples and asking their story, how they met. Some have wonderfully romantic stories involving exotic locations or for some the story starts with "I was at Collegiate and he was Hutchins", but it is amazing how many meet at the pub, the local watering hole.

As we come to John 4 weddings have been in the air. The great love of God has been declared (3:16), Jesus has acted like a bridegroom providing wine at a wedding feast (2:1-11) and has just been described as the bridegroom, picking up Old Testament language of God coming to rejoice over his people as a groom over his bride.

As we start chapter 4 with Jesus sitting at a well, the local watering hole. More than that it is described as Jacob's Well, and guess where Jacob met his wife, and for that matter Isaac and Moses? Well it was a well. So we the readers are expectantly waiting to meet the bride and when she comes along she is not whom we might expect, and the prospects don't look good.

As we consider Jesus' high noon conversation with Samaritan woman we will be able to ponder the love of Jesus for all manner of people and it even may make us look wistfully back to our first love.

## MEETING THE BRIDE

The Gospel starts with the majestic Word of God who becomes flesh, and as our passage starts Jesus' humanity is underlined, he is tired and thirsty. It is his thirst that causes him to start a conversation with this woman when he asks her for water. This may not seem very startling but in that culture it is.

Some Jewish rabbis of the time taught that it was best not to speak with a woman in public, even your wife. But the woman that Jesus speaks to is a Samaritan, with whom Jews were not usually on speaking terms as John reminds us. We might perhaps picture an Israeli soldier asking a Palestinian woman for a drink today.

This is why the woman is rather taken aback when Jesus speaks to her. Her reply almost sounds like "Well, who do you think you are?" Jesus helps her to answer that question.

### Jesus Makes An Offer – Living Water

Firstly he makes an offer, an offer of living water. There is a play on words here that is hard to capture in English as what Jesus says can mean living water or running water. Certainly the woman understands it to be the latter. Jesus tries to raise her understanding by speaking of living water which once tasted will never leave you thirsty again. She is still thinking on a literal level. In a dry and arid country, where the daily task of getting water was hard work, the idea of never having to come again must have seemed very attractive, a wonderful thing.

But Jesus is offering something even better than not needing to get water everyday, he is offering living water that will truly satisfy. Water was a common image for religious truth. For instance the Jewish teachers of the time spoke of the Law as refreshing water to which the people should regularly come and drink. Jesus is offering a truth that will satisfy once for all. Not only that, it will lead to eternal life, the life of the kingdom to come.

This is some offer. We will have to wait for a moment before we consider how Jesus can make this offer but we can say that whilst many search around for

satisfaction in all manner of things, people throughout history who have taken up Jesus offer of satisfying living water have found it to be true.[1]

**Jesus show he knows her**

The woman has shown an interest but before Jesus gives her the drink he knows that he has to deal with some aspects of her life.

He reveals that he knows far more about this woman's sex life and relationship history than would be expected. It may be that this woman's shady, even disreputable, past is why she is getting her water at the hottest time of the day as she would have been considered an outsider her own culture. As often in the gospel narratives we see Jesus associating with the most surprising people.

This woman realises that accepting this offer will mean a change in her life, and she is perhaps not yet ready to make such a move.

This revelation certainly lifts Jesus in the estimate of the woman who now sees him as a prophet but she promptly changes the subject, as if to say "That is enough about me let's talk about something else."

**Jesus doesn't get distracted?**

The woman moves the subject to a worship demarcation dispute, who worships in the right way, us Samaritans or you Jews. It is amazing that such things still happen today, people are far happier discussing the difference between Anglicans and Catholics than dealing with who Jesus truly is.

In a passage that we could easily have a number of sermons on Jesus teaches that true worship of God is based on true knowledge of God and something is happening right as he speaks which will make all religious sites superfluous, for a time of salvation and fuller understanding of God has come. Jesus will not get distracted in this conversation by religion and interesting religious topics, he wants to stay on track and keep pointing her to the truth about God that he is revealing.

**Jesus points to himself.**

The woman decided this is all a bit too difficult and says she will wait until the Messiah comes who will be able to explain all this.

Jesus then reveals that he is the Messiah. In fact he does more than that. Again there is a play on words here. Literally Jesus says "I that am talking to you, I am", using the divine name "I am", reserved for God alone in the Old Testament. This tired and thirsty man is no less than the creator God. This is why what he offers is satisfying, this is why he can speak of giving eternal life, this is why the water he gives is truly living. As God with us he can give us the Holy Spirit which is later described as living water (7:37-39) when we come to him in belief to drink.

This has all been enough to convince the woman of the importance of Jesus and she rushes off to tell others. Those whom she was trying to avoid she now seeks out to tell them about this amazing man telling them to "Come and see" for themselves. In a nice touch we are told that she leaves her water jar behind, water being less important now that she has been offered living water.

She started thinking of Jesus as some water guy and now he is, well, whata guy. She first just calls him "you" (9). She then shows him some respect by calling him "sir" (11, 15, 19) then "a prophet" (19), "the Christ" (29) and finally part of a group of people

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[1] Malcolm Muggeridge was a famous journalist last century who came to the faith late in life and he wrote this. "I may. I suppose, regard myself, or pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets – that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Inland Revenue – that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions – that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time – that's fulfilment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing, a positive impediment – measured against the draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are." (quoted in Brown, *The Gospel According to John* Vol I, p84)

who call Jesus "the Saviour of the World" (42). She along with them is now part of the bride of Christ over whom Jesus rejoices.

## A LOVE STORY

### Jesus Loves People

John particularly chooses to tell this story to illustrate the depth of Jesus love for all kinds of people.

Jesus only has 3 years, a short time of ministry, surely the big events would be best, as many feedings of 5000 as possible, yet Jesus takes the time to talk to this outcast woman. Then he spends two days in this small village so that they move from second hand to first hand knowledge.

I am sure many remember the wonderful comment from Linus in the Peanuts cartoon, "I love mankind, it's people I can't stand." Jesus wasn't like that. He loved people, he cared for people and wanted to spend time with them. This not only teaches us much about Jesus but also it reminds us that we as the church, as Jesus' people, should have time for people as well.

### Jesus Loves All People

Moreover in choosing this Samaritan adulterous outcast woman shows that the Jesus love is for all people with no barriers for race, gender or a past. This is underlined by the Jesus offer that whoever drinks the water will get the blessing, that worship is to be based on truth not race and by the final declaration by the Samaritans that Jesus is "the Saviour of the world". The message and offer of Jesus is for all people.

John then, I think, in this passage is keen to remind the reader of the importance of evangelism, to keep that in focus. The story of the return of the disciples who, as usual, don't understand what is going on underlines this. Jesus almost seems to say "How can you think about food at a time like this, there are more important things, stop thinking about earthly things and concentrate on the spiritual." For Jesus there is nothing more important than inviting people to be part of his wedding as part of the bride of Christ, as the Church is described in the book of Revelation.

This is a reminder to us as a church not to get so caught up in the mundane earthly things of social distinctions, moral separation and or earthly churchy things like styles of worship that we forget to do that which is most important, to proclaim Christ, that like the woman we may call people to come and see.

### Are we satisfied?

I started by speaking of the joy of wedding couples. It can be a bit bittersweet as well. As you hear of their romance you can look back wistfully on your own, to when things were new and exciting and all you could talk about was the love of your life.

It can be the same with our Christian life. Here we have someone's "first date" with Jesus and you can see her excitement rise as she realises that she is loved by God and that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and like anyone truly in love she can't wait to tell others. For her she has taken a great draught of living water and is fully satisfied. For those of us who have been Christians for a while do you remember when it was like that for you and do you have a dry taste in your mouth now?

When was the last time you thought of Jesus and thought "Whata guy". Are you satisfied by the love that God has shown us in Jesus and promise of eternal life?

Perhaps like the Samaritan woman and the disciples you have focused on earthly things and forgotten to see the spiritual. Perhaps like this woman you have moral issues that need to be dealt with: angers, hurts, sins and you think they can just be glossed over. Perhaps you have let religion, the way that you worship, get in the way

of truly worshipping God in Spirit and in truth. All of these need to be dealt with if we are to taste again that living water.

Perhaps most disastrously we have taken our eyes off who Jesus is and we are only dealing with him second hand. Have you have forgotten that he came to claim you as his bride, to show you that he loves you, and to rejoice over you.

One thing I find really comforting about this story is that this Jesus, who had time for this woman, is the same Jesus to whom I pray and surely he will have time to listen to me, and surely he will have time for you.

He is waiting patiently to talk with you, he loves you and perhaps I had better leave now so that you can get reacquainted in prayer.