

Jesus initiates a conversation

Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down . . . at a well . . . A woman of Samaria came to draw water . . . “Give me a drink,” he said.

Before we go any further let's learn what we can about this woman.

She belongs to an unorthodox branch of the Hebrew tradition, long hostile to its Jewish cousins. She is locked into the prejudices and discrimination of such a relationship. She is a creature of habit. As a woman she is second-class, subordinate to her menfolk. She comes back and forth every day to a cistern (*not* a well but a seasonal catch-all of rain – stagnant water). She is surprised that a Jewish traveler even speaks to her, considering Jews treat Samaritans as untouchable. Asserting her own tribe's worth she asks whether the Jews have anything so sacred as this watering hole given to her people by the patriarch Jacob and actually used by him centuries ago. Still that she is a creature of habit is also shown by the fact that she has been married five times.

What we have here is a person going nowhere, stuck in place, bored with life, no personal name, described only as “a woman”. Until Jesus opens her up with “Give me a drink,” and evokes a voice out of her that asks questions! She is forced to emerge from her status quo, her everyday trance. Where does it lead her?

She begins to see this moment as a gift of God, a deconstruction of all her learned fixations, her collective, impersonal prejudices, her cultural narrow mindedness. So used to stale water, she begins to taste the fresh, flowing water of a conversation with Jesus who reminds her that everyone as mentally parched as she will always be thirsty but that if she opens up to the refreshment he offers – a life of grace, vitality, love, curiosity – she herself will become an actual well-spring, overflowing with understanding and graceful living – refreshing to everyone she meets – especially to herself.

Which does happen. Look how energized she becomes following this conversation with Jesus. She tosses her bucket aside, runs back to town, tells everybody about this person she met . . . and the whole town comes alive. All triggered off by that initial solicitation: “Give me a drink – release upon me all your dynamic self and refresh me with your personality.”

And today that request initiates a conversation with *you*. Christ thirsts for you; do you thirst for Christ and his experience of reality? Sometimes people become so hardened, like rock, that water can't penetrate – but our first reading shows that even a heart of stone can be breached – and itself become fluid with faith, hope and love.

As today's psalm advises: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

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(Cycle A option)