

**Drink Deeply**  
**March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**John 4:5-26**  
**Lent 2 A**

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On the last mountaintop that the disciples saw Jesus, he gave them and us our direction for our life. He told them to go into the world, to spread the news of what he had done and to teach everything he taught them. This has a few ramifications for the life of a Christian. Simply put, this is our life once we come to know Jesus, what he commanded here is what our life is to be from that point on. The most important thing to say from this is to clear up the misunderstanding that once you come to faith, once you know about Jesus, you are saved and that's all the dealing with God you need to do. Coming to faith rather is the beginning of our working for God and the beginning of God working in us. And to summarize simply what Jesus commanded, we are not to be content with just knowing how he died for us, but rather we are to learn everything he has to teach, and constantly refill ourselves on the basic truths he offers. We are to grow in his Word. Secondly, we are to take that word of his into the world and share it with others so they can do the same. We are to go with his Word.

This is the structure of the life of the Christian and it is the mission of the universal church to which we all belong. But why am I bringing this all up today? Because our reading is a valuable example of both missions of the church. It is a good lesson for us both of how the truth of God is shared from Jesus' standpoint and it is also a good lesson on receiving the truth and learning from it, when we consider the Samaritan woman's perspective. So let's read through the account once more, piece by piece, and see what we can learn both about how God's word reaches us and how we can share that word with others. The story begins: <Read v5-8>.

So the encounter begins. Seems so innocuous, right? Two strangers happen to meet at a public well. The one is thirsty and doesn't have anything to draw the water with. He asks the woman if she would be so kind as to draw some water for him, since she came prepared to draw the water and take it home with her. Now, Jesus was a human being. He was tired and he was thirsty. But he was also God. He did not *need* the water and he certainly did not need someone else to give it to him. But the encounter provided the opportunity to strike up a conversation. Jesus knew what this woman needed. As we see later on, he knew the sin she was in and he knew that without saving faith, without the truth of the message he had for her, she would die. This was vitally important to convey to her. And yet, that is not where he started. He met her as a fellow human being and struck up a conversation.

These days, with all our fancy techniques and labels, we call this part of the process "pre-evangelism". It's the building of relationships that open ears to the gospel message. Now the nature and form of this pre-evangelism changes as history passes and as culture shifts. In some eras and in some cultures it was enough to greet a stranger and ask if they'd listen to what you had to say. Today, not so much. Rampant commercialism and swindlers, combined with charlatans who use the name of Jesus to rob people blind have made people culturally suspicious of strangers and even the church. It can take a lot longer to build the proper bond of trust and relationship before a person is willing to open their ears and listen to what a Christian has to say about Jesus and take them seriously. But whatever form it takes, this method of establishing some sort of opening with another person is a vital step in sharing the message of Christ that we should not overlook.

However, there was a little more to this request than just asking for a drink of water, as the Samaritan woman's initial reply makes known, <Read v9>

Jesus knew who this woman was. He knew she was a Samaritan. And unlike our culture's use of the word, Samaritan was not a nice thing to be in those days, especially around the Jews. It's a hard mindset for us to put ourselves in; we don't generally operate this way anymore. Our schools and our society teach tolerance and acceptance of all peoples and cultures so the idea of hating a person simply because they are of a different ethnicity is more foreign to us these days. Of course the Jews had some reason to hate the Samaritans, it had to do with them being an offshoot of the chosen people of God who did not follow the full revelations of the true God. But to judge each individual based on the cultural norms was still unfair and moreover the Jews themselves were hardly blameless.

Nevertheless, for Jesus to reach out in a friendly way to this woman was rather unusual. Normally a Jew would do everything possible to avoid contact with a Samaritan, and if they *had* to be near one, they were just as likely to pretend the other person wasn't even there more than anything. But Jesus reached out to her, asked her for kindness when really the endgame was trying to do her a kindness. This is probably the biggest learning point here for us from both perspectives. The shocker wasn't that a Jew was talking to a Samaritan; the shocker that a holy God was talking to a sinful human being. God was reaching out to those who were his enemies by birth. Allies of the Devil by the sin they inherited from their parents and by the sins they themselves committed. Of course the woman didn't really understand that yet, it would be shown to her soon.

For ourselves though, this shows us two very important things. First of all, you and I have passed the initial point of faith. We know of our sin and we know of our savior. But many of the same principles in *coming* to faith are the same in *maintaining* faith. And so it is equally important that we remember and recognize every day what it means that our God not only would choose to come to us to save us, but that he continues to come to us every day and offer himself to us in his Word. That he would want to come to us and teach us about himself so our lives can be enriched. And that he would continue to care for us, body and soul until we reach heaven. We were his enemies and yet he chose to approach us to help. That should help fuel the attitude of gratefulness as we take his blessings that he offers, as we grow in him.

But this is equally significant to remember as we reach out with God's word. We have to recognize that we are reaching out to people who are by nature enemies of God. Some of who they are and what they do will repulse us. They will be people that we just don't like sometimes. And equally problematic, they won't really understand on their own why they need your help. We need to expect this so we don't become discouraged as we go, and we need to remember Christ's attitude toward us so that we remain willing to share this message of salvation with everyone who needs it.

Further on then, Jesus' answer to the woman and the following conversation, <Read v10-15>.

Jesus was trying to offer her a gift, but he was being a touch cryptic. You and I know the truth he was trying to teach her already, and so we know exactly what he means. We know how the spiritual water that Christ offers refreshes the soul for eternity and how it is enough to live forever on. The woman did not understand the spiritual nature of what he said and was trying to take him literally. We can give thanks to God that he has made us understand his message as we study and learn about him. But by the same token we need to remember that the message of Christ is foolishness to the world. Until the Holy Spirit changes the heart and opens their eyes, they will not be able to understand the message we bring. Something else we must keep in mind to keep ourselves from becoming discouraged as we reach out to the world.

In response to her request, Jesus continues, <Read v16-18>.

And now here comes the conviction of the law. Jesus not only shows the woman that she is a sinner, he demonstrates to her that none of her sin is hidden from him. He is God, and he knows our sin. Remember the great pattern that God uses with us throughout all of history? He knows our needs before we do, but before he fulfills our needs, he makes sure we understand the need as well, so that we can fully appreciate the gift. An understanding of our sin is necessary before we can have a full appreciation of our Savior. If you find your faith-life lukewarm, if you struggle to maintain zeal for your Savior and what he has to teach you, this is the point you need to return to. Not to wallow in guilt and shame, but so that you really understand just how terrible a situation your God rescued you from. To put it simply, if the thanks and the joy are lacking, it's because you don't appreciate the gift as well as you could, and if you don't appreciate this gift, it's because you don't appreciate the danger you were in.

The same is true as we speak God's word to others. If the message of a savior is rejected by people, it can be because they don't think they need one. That is the opinion of the sinful self, that I am strong enough to save myself and don't need anyone's help thank you very much. But we are not strong. We are weak. Until someone is convinced that they cannot please God on their own, there is no need for Jesus.

But once that truth is known, then the healing and the joy can begin. Our account finishes, <Read v19-26>.

The woman begins to understand that something more is going on than meets the eye. And Jesus reveals to her what she needs. She needs the truth, the full explanation from the one who is qualified to give it. The Messiah. The man sitting there with her. The truth of the Messiah is what we get from our God that saves us. The simple message that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins and to rescue you from eternal death to life everlasting. That is the truth that God gave you, that is the truth that saves you. It is the water of life that we drink deeply from and it is the water of life that we have to share with the world.

On account of the message that Jesus shared, the woman forgot her water jug and ran to her town to tell everyone about this man she had met. We are told that many became believers on account of Jesus' words. That is what it is all about; the Word. Jesus gave us the command as a church and as believers to grow and to go. And the Word is how we do that. The Word is the living water by which we are refreshed in the truth of our salvation; it is the truth we learn to understand our God and his grace better. And the Word is what we have to reach out to others with. It is the water that they desperately need to drink. They are dying of dehydration without knowing it and we have the life-saving drink to offer.

The Word of God is our life and it is our greatest tool in this life. It is the living water that wells up in each of us to produce life eternal. Share that water and drink deeply of it yourself. Amen.