

I imagine that she has a history. I imagine that there are things she has done and left undone, some good some not so good. I am sure she had guilt and regrets. Fears, wounds, sorrows, and secrets. She is ...a woman with a past.

John's description of the Samaritan woman at the well is an interesting one to study. If you study the history of this text, if you read the commentaries, and listen to the interpretations, you will learn that her past is generally seen as one of promiscuousness. But where is the evidence for that? Five spouses and now living unmarried with a sixth man. Looked at but not seen. Labeled yet nameless. She remains unknown to everyone. Everyone, that is, except Jesus.

How easily we forget that women of her day had very little choice or control over their own lives. If she is divorced it is because the men divorced her. She had no right of divorce. That was exclusively the man's right.

Maybe it was a just divorce but often it was not. If she's not divorced, then she has suffered the death of five husbands. Five times left alone, five times nameless, faceless, and of no value, five times starting over. Maybe some divorced her. Maybe some died. We don't know. However it went down, divorce or death, each was a tragedy in her life.

So, let's not be too quick to judge. We don't know the details of her past. Maybe we don't need to. Maybe it is enough that she mirrors for us our own lives. We too are people with a past, people with a history. We are all like, in a sense, this Samaritan woman.

I imagine that we are all people like her, we are all people with a past, people that often live in fear of being found out. It is not just the fear that another will know the truth, the facts, about us but that they will do so without ever really seeing us and without ever really knowing us.

We all thirst to be seen and to be known at a deep intimate level. We all want to pour our lives out to someone who knows us, to let them drink from the depths of our very being. That is exactly what Jesus is asking of this woman with a past when he says, "Give me a drink." It is the invitation to let herself be **known** and to be loved.

To be found out, however, without being known leaves us dry and desolate. It leaves us to live a dehydrated life thirsting for something more, something different, but always returning to the same old wells.

We all go down to some well. For some, like the Samaritan woman, it is the marriage well. For others it is the well of perfectionism. Some go to the well of hiding and isolation. Others will draw from the well of power and control. Too many will drink from the wells of addiction. Many live at the well of busyness and denial.

I imagine that we can all name the wells that we drink from. Day after day, month after month, year after year we go to the same well to drink. We come to those wells hoping our thirst will be quenched. And yet, we leave as thirsty as when we arrived only to return the next day. For too long we have drunk from the well that never satisfies, the well that can never satisfy. Husband after husband this is the well to which the Samaritan woman has returned.

There is another well, however. It is the well of Jesus Christ. It is the well that washes us clean of our past. This is the well from which new life and new possibilities spring forth. It is the well that frees us from the patterns and habits that keep us living as thirsty people.

That is the well the Samaritan women in today's gospel found. She intended to go to the same old well she had gone to for years, the well that her ancestors and their flocks drank from. Today is different. In, interestingly the longest conversation that Jesus has with anyone in scripture, Jesus holds before her two realities of her life; the reality of what is and the reality of what might be. He brings her past to the light of the noon day. "You have had five husbands," he says, "and the one you have now is not your husband." It is not a statement of condemnation but simply a statement of what is. He tells her everything she has ever done. She has been found out.

But it doesn't end there. Jesus is more interested in her future than her past. He wants to satisfy her thirst more than judge her history. Jesus knows her. He looks beyond her past and sees a woman dying of thirst; a woman thirsting to be loved, to be seen, to be accepted, to be included, to be forgiven, to be known.

Her thirst will never be quenched by the external wells of life. Nor will ours. Jesus says so.

"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." This is the living water of new life, new possibilities, and freedom from the past. This living water is Jesus' own life. It became in the Samaritan woman "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." She discovered within herself the interior well and left her water

jar behind. She had now become the well in which Christ's life flows.

“Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him. “Come and see.” That's a sermon. That's an invitation.

It's not enough, however, to hear her story or even believe her testimony. Until we come to the well of Christ's life within us, we will continue returning to the dry wells of our life. We will continue to live thirsty. We will continue to live in fear of being found out.

So, I wonder, from what wells do you drink from? How much longer will you carry your water jars? How long will you do whatever it is that builds or inhibits barriers between you and God? There is another well, one that promises life, one by which we are known and loved. Come to a new well. Come to the well of Christ's life, the well of Christ's love, the well of Christ's presence that is already in you. Come to the well that is Christ himself and then drink deeply. Drink deeply until you become like the one you have drunk.