

## Reflections from the Well



We as women love to tell stories about relationships, don't we? You know, talk about our feelings, the men in our lives.... Well, let me tell you about my encounter with a certain man...a mysterious man, at that. You see, I was accustomed to going each morning to the well. It was THE gathering place, the hub of social activity – where women exchanged stories of village life, swapped information about the mundane, day – to day activities. Waiting in line to fill our earthen vessels with our family's daily supply of water, we would laugh at the antics of our children, complain about our men. Sometimes there would be tears and embracing as we shared our sorrows. These were my friends, my neighbors, my sisters.

These were not easy times- especially for a woman. Things were a little different than what you are used too. We didn't exactly have women's lib. I had been no stranger to tragedy, too familiar with the ways that life can turn on you, the ways that life can disappoint. A woman without a man, you see, was destined for a life of poverty. We had no way of supporting ourselves, you see. Therefore, I was determined, even desperate to do whatever it took.....I got careless, lowered my standards, I guess...and found myself in a place I never intended to be. My youth, my innocence, my reputation, slowly slipped away with each fading sunset. Until one morning I found myself on the outside of that inner circle of friends. Ever been there? Have you ever made poor choices and felt like you would be forever defined by them.

It became too hard to face the group. I heard the whispers behind my back --- saw the knowing glances they exchanged – the funny way their conversation would change when I walked into sight. It wasn't long before I just quit coming. I refused to put myself in a position where I had to hide my face, hide my shame. I wouldn't let their accusations make me feel bad. So I began waiting until a time when I knew they would be gone, back in the village tending to their daily

routine. Sure, it was hot as the sun rose high in the sky, but not as stifling and unnerving as their judgmental glances. My plan was working okay, at least it seemed to. Have you ever gotten so comfortable in your sin that you no longer even recognized it as sin? Do you sometime embrace what you know is wrong just because it seems easier than changing? Well that's where I was, until the day HE came.

He had to know how inappropriate it was to speak to me. A Jewish man – a Samaritan woman – a very fallen Samaritan woman at that. To say that I was caught off-guard is an understatement. He gently touched the sleeve of my garment as He asked for a drink of water. Was he insane??...was he that disoriented with thirst perhaps?? Desperate enough to drink from the same vessel as a sinful Samaritan Woman?? In your culture, I'm not sure that you can really comprehend how odd this was.

I turned away, and in my rush to escape, nearly tripping over one of the earthen pots at my feet....but something about his presence almost seemed to embrace me ---I was able to steady my feet and then I just stood there for a moment, a little confused --- I then turned my head toward him, but before I could speak, His eyes caught mine. My God, that look! Do you know how long it had been since someone, anyone had looked at me that way – as if I mattered, as if I were a real person? I stuttered a bit, searching for the words, a bit unnerved by his calmness.

But then I found the words to proclaim, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” Never taking his gaze off of mine, he spoke these words that I will never forget. He said, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

I thought he was crazy or perhaps the heat of the day had caused him to lose all sense of rational judgment, but he looked so perfectly at ease, so content, so concerned. But “living water”---I'm

sorry, he didn't even have a cup or a ladel to draw this water with --- surely this stranger is not making sense. Maybe I have misunderstood. "Where can you get this living water? I inquired. . He answered, " Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life".

Well, it still didn't make any sense to me, but for the first time I allowed my mind to drift to that place – living water. Did this man know how tempting that would be for me. Was he aware how cruel it would be to raise my hopes over something that would never happen. But I allowed myself just a little time to consider this highly improbable scenario.....because I was thirsty...and tired. My very soul ached to really be alive. I thought again of the thankless life of carrying water every single day in those cracked earthen jars that were so heavy. I thought of how every day was just like the rest – and the perspiration that saturated my clothes---and left me tired and weary --- and how I would do the same thing day after day for the rest of my life. Some off you understand that emptiness. But really now, could he offer a solution to this problem? Could he really quest this thirst? Surprised at the desperation in my own voice, I begged, "Sir, give me this water. So that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water"

And then things grew more uncomfortable. What had been a promising conversation began to go south on me in hurry. – he said to me "Go, call your husband and come back". I was sure he was only following the custom of the day but it didn't stop the flush I felt creeping up my neck and across my weathered face. I swallowed hard and answered, "I have no husband" There. I thought I had answered that honestly and sufficiently. Let's get back to the living water idea, I thought.

That's when my world began to cave in – “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true”. My heart sank, my pulse quickened and I felt physically sick. He knows! My God, he could see straight through to my heart – those penetrating eyes – that stare, that look that pierced to my very soul. He knew.

I suddenly couldn't take my eyes off of him. The living water, oh how I thirsted! My life was spent trying to satisfy that thirst with earthly things. I had spent my efforts building something false, hiding from the sight of others –telling myself that what I was doing was okay when it was not. I had lied to myself often enough to begin believing that those lies were true and now this man, this Jewish stranger saw through the façade. A part of me was angry – what right did he have to approach me? It was as if he could see straight through me – to my very core, my very soul. I felt naked in his presence, ashamed. He knew. He knew the things I had kept hidden from even my closest friends. He knew the details of a life that had come unglued at the seams. In one piercing look he had shattered the barriers it took years for me to build And yet, even in the presence of the filth and shame of my life, he look into my eyes as if I were somebody who mattered – not a look of pity or judgment, but of kindness, generosity, a look of love.

He spoke of a time to come when we would worship God in spirit and in truth. And I knew that which he spoke of was real.

Eager to show him that I was not ignorant of such things, I said “I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us” When all else fails, just sound religious, right? I mean, for many of you just showing up on Sunday morning makes you look religious. But when you encounter THIS man, sounding and looking religious just doesn't matter.

His next 7 words would change my life completely. “I who speak to you am he”. Suddenly it all made sense. Those words penetrated my soul and captured my very being. I knew then that this man, this Jew, this gentle spirit that seemingly came out of nowhere, and turned my journey to the well into a feast of living water was the Messiah. My Messiah...come to quench my thirst. I can't really even explain how I knew this, it was just like my eyes were open like never before and saw this man as the Savior that he was and that He still is today.

Are you that much different than I? Basically, I had an empty place in me that I tried very hard to fill. But it was a place that was created only to be filled by Christ. I tried relationship after relationship to quench my thirst, to fill this emptiness, but it just never worked. I thought, well, it must be this man that is not fulfilling me, so I moved on to another then another, but the emptiness was still there. What about you? What are you trying to fill that place with? Maybe your thing isn't relationships with men, maybe it's money, or things, or food or work. I don't know, but I would imagine that you are not so different than I. If Christ is not everything to you then he is nothing and no matter what you do you will always be thirsty until you allow him to fill you. That day I thought I had met a man, a Jew....but I met a savior, the lover of my soul and I will never thirst again. Will you?

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