

Fill My Cup, Lord

John 4:5-42

Water is essential for life. Most towns have been founded near a source of water. Traveling was restricted not only by distance, but also by the availability of water. Moses had a lot of problems with lack of water. Livestock needed water twice a day, in addition to the needs of the people. Is it surprising that grumbling started against Moses?

Moses, with the power of God, was able to quench the thirst of the animals and the people.

By the time of Jesus, life was still congregating around sources of water. Towns were built near rivers or water wells. The well, would be the place where all women would eventually see each other. Carrying water was a woman's job.

The writer of the gospel of John tells that Jesus went through Samaria. What was Samaria? It was a region of Israel. The region is still called Samaria. It has existed under from the time it was built as the large and luxurious capital of Israel around 800 B. C. But the role that the area and its inhabitants played in the New Testament Gospels is a role that is really defined by the Gospels writings, rather than by historical happenings.

In the Gospels, Samaritans are always good people, objects of prejudice and undeserved reprobation. They have become known to us mostly through the story told by Jesus about the "good Samaritan." Chances are that there were good people and bad people among the Samaritan, with the majority being good people. Just like it happens everywhere.

Historically, Israel and Judah suffered different fates at the hands of the superpowers in the region. With Israel falling to Sargon II around 722 B. C. Sargon had to do battle for three years, before the City of Samaria fell. He exiled all the educated people and left only the uneducated in the land. The legends of the 10 lost tribes of Israel come from this event.

Judah continued as a Kingdom for some time, until 596 B. C. Judah also suffered exile of the upper classes. Both kingdoms had remnants of the exiled people returned to their original lands.

There had always been religious differences between the two kingdoms, even when the two kingdoms were united during the monarchy of King David and his son, King Solomon. King David reign was from 1000 to 961 B. C. and Solomon's was from 961 to 922 B. C.

You see, the two kingdoms never felt united. The language was spoken in different ways, and religious traditions were held in different ways. In Korea, there are a few differences, but the differences between Samaria and Judah were deep.

After the people from Judah returned from the Exile, they felt that Samaria was not observing the religious practices, properly. They had a common root, but the developments of their religions had become quite different. This is not new, today.

The Methodist Church of Mexico is the product of the missionary work of the American Methodist Church, but they have evolved differently. The Methodist church of Mexico is very evangelistic, anti Roman Catholic. They do not drink, smoke, or dance. American Methodists are very different. Some drink, some smoke and some dance. They are not as evangelistic as the Mexican Methodists. Many Mexican Methodists, when they come to the United States, they attend Assemblies of God, rather than the Methodist Church of the USA.

Because of the differences, soon, the people of Judah and the people of Samaria were not even friendly. The Jews (people from Judah) not even wanting the shadow of a Samaritan falling on them. This was a difficult issue, because at the time of Jesus, the Jews lived north and south of Samaria. If a Jew was going to travel from the north to the south, he or she had to cross through Samaria or take a long detour through the Jordan Valley.

Jesus decided to go through the Jordan Valley.

I said earlier that water was an important issue when traveling. Drawing water in that part of the world, is a job for women. They did not have and still prefer not to have a pulley system with a bucket to draw water... Instead, the women lower their jars or skins on a rope and pull it up.

They never left the jars or the skins by the well. So, whenever someone wanted water and did not have a rope and a container, had to wait until someone would show up with one and then, ask that person for water.

This was not uncommon. It was a way of life. If a woman went to get water, she would not be surprised to find a traveler asking for water. The polite thing to do, according to tradition, was to offer them water.

By now you know that Jesus is doing something very unusual. He is traveling through an area that is avoided by observant Jews. To make things worse, he carries a conversation with a woman. Talking to a woman??? At that time, it was taboo; it was prohibited, for men to speak to women in public. Many men would not even talk to their wives, in public!

Yet, here is Jesus, going through a land observant Jews avoid, talking to a woman, and she is a Samaritan! Then, we learn that she is a Samaritan with a reputation!

When the disciples returned, they were surprised. I understand their surprise!

However, as we read the story, we learn that this Samaritan woman is the person to announce Jesus as the Messiah. She tells a group of Samaritans about Jesus and they believed! They invited Jesus to stay with them and he and the disciples stayed for a couple of days.

Now, here we are. We do not worry about where we are going to get our water. We do not worry about being rejected. We can legally sue those who reject us!

Jesus is also here. He knows who we are, for real. Like with the woman at the well, he knows what is going on in our hearts. But Jesus is not here to point an accusatory finger at you or me. He is here offering us like living water.

Do we, like the Samaritan woman, ask Jesus for the water? Many of us have a problem with what it means accepting Jesus. We feel that it requires super human efforts and we have to live super clean lives.

Being a Christian, means that we have drunk from the living waters and we can live ordinary lives like anyone else, but with a different attitude! We still have to content with traffic at 410. We still have to buy groceries. We still have to work next to some people who are not as nice as we would want them to be. We still have to live with bad news and bad moments.

But as a Christian, I know that I can go through the good moments and the bad moments with Jesus next to me. I can be a conqueror even in the midst of defeat.

Sometimes, it is not easy living in a land that has different traditions and different values. The Samaritans knew that. Even among Mexican Americans I sometimes feel misunderstood. You see, I grew up a poor Mexican. It is a special subculture. I know what it means being rejected because I did not belong. I was rejected because I was poor.

Many times, my wife and I feel lonely in the midst of a lot of people here in San Antonio. We do not understand some of the things around us... and the folks around us do not understand us... Do you know the feeling?

Then, I remember. Jesus is with me. Jesus is with my wife and with me. He is the source of living water. With him by my side, I can go on. This does not mean that all of a sudden I understand what is going on in the culture around me. It means that Jesus gives me strength to be myself in the midst of the reality I live in.

The woman at the well, died a Samaritan. She could set her past aside. She lived with the reality that she had been married several times and she lived with a man who was not her husband. But from the moment she drank living water, she lived as a Samaritan woman who knew Jesus! She continued to be rejected by observant Jews, but she loved those observant Jews, because she had Jesus as her companion. The Samaritan woman was still a second class citizen in her society because she was a woman, but because she had met Jesus, she knew that she was treasured by God as a person. Life was no longer the same. She had changed.

The offer is still good. Jesus' invitation is still there. Do you want to drink of the living water that Jesus offers?