

“Stay Thirsty My Friends!”

By Steve Ramer

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FCMF #1

Scripture:

John 4:5 - 30 and 39-42

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “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.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “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.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” ...Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him... Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony...

Sermon:

Sometimes, when I am preparing a sermon,
I like to come up with the elevator speech first.
You know, the super quick version that if you had to,
you could complete before your elevator reached its destination.

So, going up?

The main point of our story is, I believe,
that God is basically not bound by space or place.
God is present not just on one mountain, or only in one temple,
or cathedral or even in a simple meeting house like ours at FCMF.

Each one of us can encounter God anytime, anywhere!
And in the end it is the encounter that, well... counts!

Being thirsty at a well, is, well... merely a really handy storytelling device!
Those who first heard this story, could no doubt relate easily
to being thirsty and to the regular scarcity of water.
Like many of the poorest in our world today, securing clean water
was a task that could take major portions of each day.

Regular folks back then might regularly face extreme seasonal shortages.
For them, being parched, would not have been a figure of speech.
Hungering and thirsting, similarly,
were not just handy spiritual metaphors.

But religion often forgets this simple fact and can set up
holy territories in order control the experience of God.

Jesus is claiming that the only prerequisite for one's encounter
with God is one's attitude, not one's longitude and latitude.
And in addition, the Divine, it seems, is most available
to those who are keenly aware that they are in desperate need.

Those who are desperate and who are open
and who continue to search for true satisfaction will find it.
They will encounter the One who can truly refresh them.

"Bing," time to get off!

Perhaps it was a longer ride than you thought at first?

Now, I'll add in the fluff, in an attempt to try
and make it more interesting and perhaps memorable!

*"Now I don't always drink beer, but when I do,
I prefer Dos Equis. Stay thirsty my friends!"*

Okay I'll admit it, I watch a lot of sports on TV,
so I'm exposed to tons of beer commercials,
as well as lots of ads for trucks, and for some reason,
an ever increasing number of ads for erectile dysfunction?

Each one of course promises far more than we know they can deliver;
projecting power, excitement, adventure and the fountain of youth!

Take Mr. Dos Equis for instance.
He is an aging lithario with stunningly gorgeous women on each side.

Introduced to us as "the most interesting man in the world"
the narrator begins to list some of his more notable
yet ridiculously impossible exploits.
The ad ends with him looking into the camera
and signing off with his patent catch phrase,
"Stay thirsty my friends!"

We of course snicker since we know that our thirst for adventure
can't possibly be quenched by the contents of that bottle?

But similarly we cannot begin, however, to satisfy any thirst
until we first know what it is we are thirsting for.

For those who had to walk miles to find clean water,
Jesus' claim that he can provide "Living Water" certainly
must have been quite intriguing.

In our society, except for some notable places such as Flint Michigan,
very few of us get all that excited about easy access to clean water.
Rather we seem to get a whole lot more excited
about beer as a source of a meaningful life!

But I'm confused, after 30 years or so of drinking beer,
it doesn't seem to be working!

Rather than being surrounded by super models,
all I've managed to accumulate is this "beer gut!"

And yet, “the most interesting man in the world”
and I do agree about one thing --
and that is the necessity of “staying thirsty.”

But the key is, however, to know what really it is you are truly thirsty for
because that is what Jesus is promising that he will quench.

So lets go back to our story.

Let me start out by saying that there are just so many things
that are just so wrong here - so many things that just do not seem
to fit the cultural norms of Jesus’ society.

First is the fact that Jesus is alone - with a woman!
And why is she alone?
Such a thing would rarely happen today in Palestine let alone back then.

So just what kind of woman is she?
Five husbands in the past and now living with a man
would have created a great deal of suspicion.

And yet Jesus is hanging out in public with her?

She is also a Samaritan, a tribe of folks that other Jews despised.
They had their own holy Mountain, Gerizim
and a temple on the top which competed with Jerusalem.
Sychar was at the base of this hill and thus in Samaritan territory.

It would have been difficult for Jesus to avoid such folk,
but instead he actually strikes up the conversation with this woman.
But wait there is more.

When the conversation moved on to theology Jesus actually
engaged her in honest and respectful dialogue.

Girls would not have been formally trained like boys in Rabbinical schools
and yet her points on several really serious issues
were rational and thoughtful.

Issues and stuff he has yet to really discuss with his own disciples.

Stuff he had tried to talk about in Jerusalem
with some of the most learned in his society but was rejected.

In chapter two, when asked by the scribes in Jerusalem to show a sign or perform a miracle that would prove he was chosen, Jesus challenged them to destroy the temple which he would then rebuild in only three days.

Destroy the edifice that claims to contain God inside its walls!
Destroy those claims that God belongs only to us and is on our side!

But those Jews in Jerusalem, rejected out of hand, any notion that place, in this case the temple, was superfluous to actually knowing God.

This was what made, what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, so radical.

But the Jews of Samaria and of Judea would have known this. Throughout Hebrew scripture it had been made abundantly clear that God did not reside in houses built by humans. But rather, God could reside anywhere and especially the Divine desired to dwell within the hearts of those who sought to follow God's laws.

The battles between Mt Gerizim and Mt Zion (in Jerusalem) had displaced that truth and placed the worship of God within those limits established by folks with vested interests in gaining power, wealth, prestige and promoting their side.

Sorta like trying to find living water in a stagnant pool rather than in a roaring stream of justice which we know is much harder to control.

Jesus was crossing so many cultural, religious, gender and tribal lines here it's no wonder that his disciples are confused and likely unnerved with what they are witnessing to the point that they cannot even figure out what to say.

Which brings me to the final item that seems so incongruent and that is, this unnamed woman becomes Jesus' first evangelist!

She leaves the well in a hurry and begins to preach the Good news about her encounter with Jesus to her fellow Samaritans.

This would also make her an "apostle" if you please.

Not only does a woman get it right off the bat, which often was not the case for Jesus' own disciples

but her much maligned sect becomes some of the first believers.

Jesus' earlier reception by the wealthy and powerful in Jerusalem had been, how should we say, extremely cold - frozen not chosen! But the marginalized in Samaria came out in droves to hear him?

Even the Jews of Galilee, his own kith and kin, rejected him. In similar ways it seems throughout history, it is usually the weak, the poor and the marginalized who are the first to truly know and follow Jesus.

No, we cannot save time in a beer bottle, nor can we find the fountain of youth in the bottom of a pill bottle.

We will never find truth or our true essential value through collecting and holding onto things in our world.

We cannot keep our God contained within a box, or a building, or a particular culture, or nation, or even a religion.

Only God can truly quench our thirst with freely unmerited gifts! Gifts that our God desires to shower upon us in abundance. A virtual waterfall of love, hope, joy, peace, patience, kindness, courage and faith all flow upon us from a source that none of us can control.

But what we can control, all we really need to remember to do, is to sit quietly and patiently and soak in that cool, clean river that is God's enveloping presence!

It is not just "okay" to be thirsty, it is essential! It is then, our thirstiness that drives us to seek and to find that which can truly satisfy.

It is our thirst, our needs that can compels us to search for the one and only one who will truly drench and quench our souls. So, you got it, stay thirsty my friends!

Psalms 42:1

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.