

Trinity Church
February 24, 2008

Third Sunday of Lent
RCL, Year A, 3 Lent

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Jesus said, "The water that I will give you will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water."

Far be it from me to speak about the spiritual dynamics of women generally, much less the spiritual dynamics of the Samaritan woman who came to draw water from Jacob's well. So, let me turn to an article by Melinda Flannery, an Episcopal laywoman, entitled "More than Routine Chores." In this article, she testifies to how busy and distracted he is, how many things left undone in a busy household. She finds herself on Sunday afternoon with little time to go to the store, but there was no milk, no bread, no orange juice, nothing for supper, and on top of that no Tylenol to deal with her headache. She asked her husband to go with her to the store for moral support, and after a little whining, he went along. Pushing the cart down the aisle, it was old home week. There were at least four other moms she knew from her son's school. They were all tired too; they laughed about how the weekend had gotten away from them, and how they would rather be anywhere but at the grocery store.

Melinda writes, "O know that I am not the only one around these days who feels that there is no time for anything but the basics, no time for reflection, let alone home-made cookies. Caught up in the exhaustion, I certainly was not expecting to encounter God at the supermarket. I was not expecting anything."

Those who study the Scripture for a living have a field day with Jesus and the Samaritan woman. They liken Jacob's well to a modern day truck stop, except its for camels, and they liken the Samaritan woman to one of those tough, if not loose, women who work at truck stop cafes. She was not expecting an encounter with God at the well. She wasn't expecting much of anything from Jesus.

When people who are busy living moment to moment, or people who just do what they've got to do to get by, think of God, they often cast God as the judge who will point out to them how uncentered their lives are, how they could have more self-esteem; or they see God as a disapproving mother, saying that her life was complicated too, but she got the laundry done and the dinner on the table, and she didn't ask for help. God as a matriarch with no compassion, Lording it over the family.

But then there is the Jesus of John's glorious Gospel. Krister Stendahl, this generation's most winsome Biblical scholar, says that John's Gospel isn't about God as judge, or God Lording it over us. God is about life, and satisfying, God-given grace-filled life. "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people." Addressing the Samaritan woman, Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water from Jacob's well will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." the Samaritan woman replies, "Sir, give me this water." Give me life. give me abundant, fulfilling, forgiving, satisfying, God-given, grace-filled life, gushing up in me. She not only wants it for herself, but she brings out the townspeople to listen to Jesus, and who, with her, proclaim, "We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

I wish that I could say that we had invited Mabeth Hudson to Trinity today as our Lenten speaker because we were reading the story of the woman at the well. Mabeth is the founder of Well for the Journey, called just “the Well” for short, and the core program of the Well is called “Women at the Well.” The Well was founded when a group of busy, over-extended women read this Gospel story. Like Melinda in the grocery store, they realized that they did not expect to meet God in the grocery store or anywhere else in their lives. They were just too busy doing what needed doing. They were drawing water time and again from the well, only to remain thirsty and tired. And yet, there was Jesus, right before them, calmly asking for a drink, calmly offering living water, calmly offering life — in him was life, and that life was the light of the world. They said, “Give us this water that we may drink it, and not thirst again.” Jesus was the life that they were missing, and they knew that they would never receive that life if they expected nothing, if they didn’t stop and make room for that abundant life in their lives. Well for the Journey was born, followed by daily reflections on the website, mystics on Monday, Reel Faith that reflects on God and films, the busy person’s retreat, and much more for men and women. The Well is a today story, a now story, that is the same story as that long-age encounter of Jesus and the woman at the well.

That long-age story could be a now story for you as well. You could turn aside from that business and exhaustion that Melinda describes so well, and you can turn to Christ, who is as close to you as a drink of water, and you can receive living water, gushing up in you to eternal life, abundant, focused, purposeful, grace-filled, reflective life. In him was life, life meant to fill you and all people. Sir, give me this water that I may truly live.