

University Evangelical Lutheran Church and Campus Ministry

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“Drinking From Our Own Wells”

A Sermon by Pr. Terrance Jacob on John 4:5-15

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I remember working with a group of churches in a rural part of the world, where people once relied on rivers, dams and wells for water. With the advent of tourism in this pristine countryside, under the guise of development, the rivers were dammed upstream. Aquifers feeding wells and water sources were tampered with. All this was to benefit tourists and the developers, yet this began the hardships of the rural residents. The pre-development negotiations with residents included a promise that they will have water piped to their houses, if they moved closer to each other into a newly created housing development. This, they were told will provide them with water, right to their homes. So residents obliged.

Ten years later, the residents had no water due to the lack of maintenance of the utility company’s water systems. The people told me they had to walk miles to get a bucket of water from water tanks delivered twice a week on the back of trucks. I remember sitting down with an old woman, listening to her story. She said, “Pastor, we don’t need these people’s water! I wish I could drink from my own well!”

The woman at the well, initially did not understand Jesus when He said that if she knew the gift of God and who He was, she would have asked him for a drink of the living water. Instead she more-or-less said, “We drink from our own Samaritan well!”

So often we are blinded by our own identities: our family name, our cultural heritage, our gender, our education, our background and all that makes us who we are. So when we encounter truth, we are blinded and do not see it. To be fair to the Samaritan woman, her gender, cultural heritage, location, marital status, and all that made her who she was, was right before her. One could say that, just by showing up as a male Jew, Jesus shoved her identity in her face. So can we expect her to immediately grasp what Jesus is saying? Can we expect that she would readily accept His message?

When we do as Jesus did, and offer the Gospel to others, we should expect that they would not readily accept or believe the Gospel of Jesus. Like the woman at the well, and the old rural woman in my story, they would say, "I drink from my own well!"

The Samaritan woman and the rural woman did not trust this "new thing". For the rural woman, water from faucets was new, and had let her down. It had given her problems and not kept its promise for a better life.

For the Samaritan woman, her distrust and doubt had many layers. She had been used and abused by men. She had had five husbands who divorced her (women could not divorce their husbands; the man had to divorce her). Another layer of distrust is that Samaritans were seen by Jews as "half castes", with heritage that was not "pure" but mixed with other nations; Samaritans saw Jews as departing from the law of Moses by adding to the Pentateuch (the so-called five books/scrolls of Moses). Yet, when Jesus spoke to her, she found herself believing. When she drank from the well of living water, she believed. Not only did she believe, but she told her whole town about Jesus.

When God is at work, people can go from "I want to drink from my own well!" to "I want some of the living water from the Well you drink at!" When the church worked as God's agents for justice and forced the authorities to have running water restored, the old woman was overjoyed!

Now let's turn for a moment to what wells we drink at. The world and our humanness wants us to be self-reliant. Even in churches, the

message is that we need to mature from being fed to feeding others. So we too are pushed to “drink from our own wells”. Drinking the living water, that is, receiving the salvation of Jesus, is an ongoing practice. If we do not constantly drink from Jesus, if we do not constantly practice the presence of God through prayer, meditation and reading or listening to the Word of God, our well runs dry. When we try to give people the living water by speech and deeds, it is ineffective, if our wells are dry.

Let’s continue this time of Lent by intentionally spending quality time with Jesus, through intentional prayer and reading of our bibles. For example: read a Bible passage, reflect on what it means for you in our own life today, and pray to God that the word becomes alive in your life. The text today led me to pray for boldness. It led me to bring all of me to Jesus, as the Samaritan woman did. It led me to ask Jesus to open my eyes that I may see Him, then to give me the courage to spread the Gospel unapologetically and unashamedly. That was my prayer and meditation. It could be yours too, or you could read another passage and meditate on it. Do that this Lent and watch God fill your well to overflowing. Then you will feel compelled to tell others. Amen.