
Stories of Solidarity :: Well-Intentioned Faith

by michael j. kimpan

Jesus was tired.

The journey to Galilee was a long one and, as was his custom, Jesus led his band of misfits through the taboo-laden Samaritan countryside. At the direction of their teacher, the disciples had gone into the city to buy food, leaving Jesus alone with his thoughts at an ancient well, dug up some 2,000 years beforehand by their forefather, Jacob.

Jesus watched as the Samaritan woman approached, water pitchers in her hands and on her head. She must have passed by his disciples along the way. Jesus wondered how they had treated the woman - hopefully with kindness - if the seed of his story on being a good neighbor had yet taken root in their minds.

When she arrived at the well, the Rabbi spoke.

'Give me a drink.' Jesus said.

Knowing her place, the woman was stunned. *'How is it that you, being a Jewish Rabbi, would speak to me - a Samaritan woman?'* Beyond acknowledging her humanity, the very act of drinking from her water jugs would make this Jewish teacher ceremoniously unclean.

No self respecting Rabbi would dare do such a thing.

The woman wondered if he wanted something more than just water from her. She shuddered at the haunting memories of the types of men she had known and attempted to ignore the stinging sensation in her soul. This man was likely just like the others. Most were.

She had tried for years to forget, yet still she remembered. She would *a/ways* remember.

His gentle voice interrupted her thoughts.

'If you knew who I was, you'd be asking me for a drink. I have access to living water — whomever drinks of the water I give you will never be thirsty again.'

'That would certainly be a time-saver,' she thought. She mustered a smile at the Teacher. *'Give me this water so I won't be thirsty and will no longer need to come all the way out here to draw.'*

It was a long walk.

The Rabbi asked her to fetch her husband.

'I... don't have one.' Those words were painful to speak.

Jesus pressed in, sensing her need for something to quench her spiritual thirst.

She had tried coping with the pang of life with the medication prescribed to her by men. It wasn't working, and her current live-in suitor had a fear of commitment. As she began to speak with this stranger about the intimate details of her life, her self-protective instincts forced her to change the subject.

She exploited their differences.

'You Jews say YHVH is to be worshipped in the Temple of Jerusalem, on Mount Zion. We Samaritans have built our own temple here on Mount Gerizim - since we have been despised as outcasts by your people for centuries.'

Her blood boiled at the injustice and arrogance of those that deemed themselves *pure bloods*. The factual history was much more complicated than that. She'd had 'conversations' with men like this so-called teacher before.

Yet there was a subtle thought — a n aching hope deep within her that believed this one could be different. Perhaps he had something that could bring resurrected life to her desperate heart after all.

'An hour is coming — it's here now — when where you worship doesn't matter,' Jesus said. *'My father doesn't care which temple or upon what mountain you worship in. God cares that you worship in spirit and in truth. God is spirit — so when you worship God, you must worship him with more than just the outside — and in sincerity.'*

She looked forward to that day. The Scriptures promised of a liberating king who would come and make all things right and new. *'When he comes...'*

'I who speak to you am he.'

The woman ran back to her city to share the life-giving water with her companions. *'Listen to his teachings! See for yourself — he is the one!'*

The disciples, meanwhile, had come back — amazed to find Jesus speaking with a woman. Yet none said anything, for fear they were missing something.

<I fear we may be missing something, as well.>

When the Scriptures were written, parchment was expensive. Ink was expensive. The authors of the gospels and stories and narratives we encounter in our ancient sacred text gave us only the information they deemed absolutely necessary – and there's more meat here than first meets the eye. It's up to us as students of the scriptures to read in between the lines, to find ourselves in these stories - understanding that *context and usage determine meaning*.

As we look at the stories of Jesus standing in solidarity with those previously pushed to the margins by the religious elite such as in this story from John 4, we must ask ourselves : *What is really going on here? What's the point of this story?*