

Encounters with Jesus II - The Woman at the Well

Today I'll have been married for 10 years. 10 years. It's an eternity compared to... well... compared to my life before. But a lot has changed, and 10 years doesn't seem so impossible now.

Jeremiah is actually my sixth husband. Does that shock you? I know it's an awful lot. But there were always reasons to divorce that seemed so good at the time. You know that I couldn't actually divorce them, of course. The law didn't allow it because I'm a woman. But there are ways; there are ways. And I just couldn't help but be drawn away when a new man showed interest in me.

The first time, I don't know what it was about me that drew him in. I was minding my own business with all the other women in town. But somehow, he must have known the attention my heart hungered for, and I couldn't resist. Once it happened once, and I was divorced from the first husband and onto the second, my reputation was settled. From there on out, I got lots of attention from all the seedy men in town. So one after the other, I was seduced, divorced, and moved on.

I can't deny my own responsibility though—not now. I know that I had choices to make, even then, about faithfulness to my vows. I can't explain it to you except to say that I was hungering for something that I couldn't find. I always hoped that the next man would be the answer.

In a way, a man did provide me with the answer. But it wasn't any answer I'd ever thought to look for. And I'm not talking about Jeremiah now.

It was a really hot day. By this time, I was avoiding meeting with the other women in town. I used to spend all my time with them—gathering water, washing clothes, preparing food. You know, the things women do. But by the time I made it to husband number three, I wasn't really welcome. It's not like they were overtly cruel to me. I would just catch someone staring. And they certainly kept the younger girls away from me. They didn't want whatever it was that I had to rub off on their precious children. So it became easier to just make my own way. I began to avoid gathering with anyone in town. I became really lonely. And cynical. I doubted that anyone could actually truly care about me at all.

So anyway, it was a hot day. I usually tried to gather water early in the morning, just after the other women left. But for some reason that day I had other things going on. So I didn't get to the well until about noon. And there was this guy just sitting there. He looked exhausted. And he was sitting there, in the sun. As I approached, he was leaning back against a stone, his arm flung over his forehead, sort of shading his eyes. I thought his eyes were closed, so I went around to the other side of the well. I was trying to avoid all manner of questionable situations. By this time I'd met Jeremiah. Though we weren't married, he treated me differently than all the men before. I knew that he loved me, and I didn't want to jeopardize it.

So I was attaching my rope to the skin I'd brought to draw water when I heard the man's voice.

"Will you give me a drink?"†?

I looked over at him, and he was staring straight at me. His eyes were kind. He didn't look at me the way the men in town did, like I was an object for his own pleasure. His eyes

didn't waver from my face as he waited for the answer. I was accustomed to being treated poorly by men, and I noticed he was a Jew from the way that he dressed, so I didn't immediately offer him the hospitality I should have.

"You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"†

It was odd that he did, actually. Most Jews that I had encountered would never drink from the same skin as a Samaritan. They were so angry that we didn't accept all of their holy books and that we disagreed with them about how to properly worship God. So anyway, it seemed like a reasonable objection. But he responded very strangely.

"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," I 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?"†

The man 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 [life with the Eternal One.]"†

I hesitated for just a second, and then I said, "'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'"† You see, it would've solved a lot of problems for me if I didn't have to keep coming back to the well in the middle of the day like that. But then it got even weirder.

"Go, call your husband and come back," he said.†

"I have no husband," I replied.†?

"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."†

I was shocked. And horrified. How did this man know all about me? He had not been in our town. Although I might have looked tired, disheveled, even coarse, he could not have known the actual number of my former husbands without special knowledge from God. But I didn't wish to talk about my sordid history. So I tried a diversion. I recognized that he must be a prophet, so I asked him about where we should be worshipping—on the mountain in Samaria, like my people believed, or in Jerusalem, like the Jews believed.

He replied, "Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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."†

It was then that I began to suspect that he was the one who was prophesied about—the one who would teach and explain everything to us Samaritans. So I said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."†

And he said, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."†

Just then, a group of men approached us. They seemed to know the man. So I left abruptly, leaving my water skin behind. I started out walking back toward town, thinking about all that the man had said. It was then that I realized that the water he was offering wasn't

real water at all—it was something else. Could it be that which I had been seeking all this time? He had mentioned life with the Eternal One—could that be what I was missing? As I thought about it, I started walking faster and faster. By the time I reached the town, I was running and calling out to the townspeople - “Come, you have to meet this man., he told me everything I ever did.†

Could he be the Messiah?” I didn’t even hesitate. I ran right to the gates of the city where the important men sat. And then I went to the river where the women were gathered and told them too. I must have made quite a spectacle, because many followed me back to the well.

When we arrived, the townspeople invited Jesus to stay in town for a couple of days. He did, and he taught us many things about becoming his followers. If you can believe it, he actually invited us, Samaritans, to become his disciples. Many in town decided to follow him. They even began to call him the Savior of the world.

So that was the day that my life changed. I couldn’t get enough of Jesus’s words. I spent every moment of those two days with Jesus, listening to him explain things. I dragged Jeremiah along, and we both were transformed.

When Jesus used the picture of living water, I think he did that on purpose. As we talked more during his stay, I saw that the life he was inviting us to was one of celebration, abundance, joy, unpredictability, and fruitfulness. I think of verdant green plants and rich and diverse animal and plant life, and I think that we are invited into life the way it was meant to be. Jesus explained that we could have this life through him. It was the life I’d always wanted. What was even more amazing is that he offered this life now. Unlike the teachings I’d grown up hearing, which promised a wonderful life after the final resurrection, Jesus was offering this life in the here and now.

Shortly after that, Jeremiah and I were married, and we’ve been together ever since. When we learned of Jesus’s death, we were heartbroken. But then we heard the news that he had risen from the dead, and we traveled to meet with his disciples. We have been living among them since then.

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† Quotations taken from John 4.

The woman’s story about meeting Jesus is found in John 4. The story that appears here is a fictionalized version based on the Bible and commentaries that interpret and explain his story. The woman’s story about what happened to her after Jesus stayed in her town is the author’s pure conjecture. There is no biblical evidence that the woman ever got married to the man she was living with or that she joined Jesus’s disciples after he died and was raised again.

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Discussion Questions

- What did you notice about this story?
- What did you wonder about?

- What do you think the woman was looking for?
- Why do you think she was looking for it in men?
- Why do you think she didn't find it there?

- What was the life that Jesus was offering? How was it different from the life offered by the other men in the woman's life?
- How do you think that the woman was to take hold of the life Jesus was offering?
- How do you think she was supposed to learn about that life?

- Jesus said, "true worshipers will worship me in spirit and in truth." What does it mean to worship someone?
- What did it mean that Jesus said that people would worship him? According to Jewish culture, who deserved worship?
- What does it mean that God is seeking out worshipers?
- What does a life of worship look like? Do you think it's similar to or different from life with the Eternal One?

What are you looking for that you haven't been able to find? Do you think Jesus is able to provide them for you?