

John 4:5-42  
Exodus 17:1-7  
23 March 2014

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An atheist complained to a Christian friend, “You Christians have special holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Jews celebrate their national holidays, such as Passover and Yom Kippur. But we atheists have no recognized national holidays, It’s unfair discrimination.”

His friend replied, “Why don’t you celebrate April first?”

### Water From the Rock

“African-American educator Booker T. Washington was fond of telling a story about how a vessel in the South Atlantic Ocean signaled for help from another vessel not far off: "Help! Save us, or we perish for lack of water!" The captain of the other vessel's reply was "Cast down your buckets where you are." Supposing that the second captain had not gotten the message accurately, the troubled ship signaled yet again. "Help! Save us, or we perish for lack of water!" Again the nearby ship signaled back, "Cast down your buckets where you are!" This exchange went on until the first ship, in desperation, decided it had nothing to lose by following this outlandish advice. When crew members cast down their buckets, they drew them up filled with clear, cool, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon. They had not realized that the powerful current of the Amazon River carried fresh water from the South American rain forests many miles out in to the South Atlantic. (McKenzie)

Have you ever been so thirsty you would do anything for a drink of water? Some of the parades I march in are long and hot. We all carry water bottles on those days but sometimes we run out. It gets to the point where we have wanted to grab a cold drink out of the unsuspecting hands of a parade goer.

Then there are those days when it seems you can’t get enough water no matter how much you drink. My little brother, who will be 47 in a couple of weeks, is a triathlete. These guys and gals swim 2.2 miles, bike 118 and then hobble off their bikes to run 26.2 miles. They run a marathon after depleting their systems. Part of their training is to know how much to eat and drink – but sometimes the heat and the body conspire the runner’s downfall.

When Dave was on the last half of his marathon in Kona, he couldn’t keep anything down. He finished the race and was immediately helped to the medical tent. He took in two liters of saline through an IV before he was allowed to emerge. An hour before he looked like he was going to pass out. Now he all he wanted to do was go chow down a hamburger. He was back.

That was one extreme kind of thirst. Our stories this morning illustrate thirst as well. For the Israelites it was not only a thirst for water in the desert but a thirst for direction. Being led out from a land called Sin is symbolic of accepting a new path. So we have a miraculous story of finding water from a rock – and a radical story of a people being chosen by God.

For the Samaritan woman it was a thirst for meaning.

We could go on about this nameless woman's past – speculate why she had so many husbands and is now with one who is not. Suffice it to say her reputation precedes her. With the dynamic of many a small town, she was familiar to everyone, but no one really knew her. Until Jesus came along.

Jesus, who divinely bridges the divide between the restrictions of religion, gender and society, truly sees this woman. He doesn't judge. There is no need for forgiveness. They banter back and forth with an echo of Jesus' previous midnight conversation when Nicodemus doesn't quite see. The Samaritan woman does see – and we get a glimpse of the person behind the reputation.

Keep in mind that “seeing,” in John, is an important theological activity. “To see” is often connected with belief. When the woman says, “I see you are a prophet,” she is [therefore not changing the subject but] making a confession of faith.’

‘Why? Because Jesus has “seen” her. He has seen her plight of dependence, not immorality. He has recognized her, spoken with her, offered her something of incomparable worth. He has seen her -- she exists for him, has worth, value, significance . . .’(Lose) All of a sudden, she is someone, and even though John very likely knew her name, we are left without it. That, too, is significant because anyone of us could be her. Fortunately for us, Jesus steps into the divide in all our lives.

Like the woman at Jacob's well we all have needs and wants, hopes and dreams. We all have times when we feel we are misunderstood. It seems a part of being human is the desire to be recognized and valued. Sometimes it comes out in unhealthy ways – an outburst, a withdrawal, or poor behavior. Anyone who has raised a child or has worked with young people knows that acting up or acting out is the only way that child knows how to express himself. If we can recognize that and see beyond the behavior, we get a glimpse of the need or the pain underneath. For some the need is as simple as a “thank you” that never comes. As one writer put it: “Being seen. It's a powerful thing. To know that another human being has truly seen you, understood you, received you for who you really are: that is pure grace. It is being seen. Most of us would do anything for it.” (Florence)

The Samaritan woman came all the way to Jacob's well carrying her empty water jar. Most people over the centuries have believed she went at noon to avoid hostile stares or snide comments. Now I wonder if she didn't go just for a break and with a hope that something in her life might change. The funny thing is, the day she met Jesus, and she went back to her village – she left her empty and dry jar behind.

On this third week of Lent we find ourselves at the well that is Jesus - an oasis in a parched land. We can leave behind those empty jars we have been carrying around. Today allow yourself to see where God is making water spring from the rock hard places of our lives. This is the good news: Jesus sees us, knows us, accepts us and is our living water.

Anna Carter Florence, Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary; quoted in [thegoodprecher.com](http://thegoodprecher.com) for 23 March 2014.

David Lose, in “Leaving it all Behind” at [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org) for 23 March 2014

Quote from Alice McKenzie’s Edgy Exegesis, at [patheos.com](http://patheos.com). She is the George W. and Nell Ayers Le Van Professor of Preaching and Worship at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.