

## *Questions at noon*

*(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - John 4:5-42)*

I always come to the well in the middle of the day, you see I have no option. I used to come in the early morning with the other women, but I couldn't handle the stares, the whispers, the sniggers and the gossip. Talking about things they knew nothing about, making assumptions, never asking, just assuming they knew. They judged me without ever knowing me. Did they know the hurt and pain I had been through losing five husbands – five! They just assumed I was a wanton, at fault, if only they had asked. I would have told them of the pain widows felt or the pain women who have been divorced by their husbands felt – not much choice in any of that – left without someone to support you, no kids, no money, only shame and pain. It was easier to come in the middle of the day when everyone else was home doing their chores, I got a bit of silence to think and there was no harassment and no judgement.

So out to Jacob's well I went that day. You can imagine my shock when I realized I wasn't alone. There was a man there – should I continue on, or turn around and run? Wonder what the gossip mongers would say now? Not just any man, but a Jewish man, this was going to be interesting. What is he doing here in Samaria, does he not know of the conflict between Samaritans and Jews?

I come a bit closer, and he asks me for a drink? Me, a Samaritan woman is asked by a Jewish man for some water – talk about breaking all the boundaries – gender, cultural, religious. So, I then start with my questions – why ask me a woman, a Samaritan, a person of dubious background for a drink? But I do draw out some water from him, after all he is a foreigner in these parts, just travelling through, so of course he has nothing to draw out water with.

As I hand him some water he starts a conversation about water, responding I guess to my shock at his request. He is talking about who he is, although a bit cryptically for me and then he is talking about living water, water that means you will never thirst. Now that sounds very attractive, no more trips in the burning sun.

Alas, I have taken him literally. Much like I would discover much later that Nicodemus, who became my friend, had done when he went to ask Jesus questions. How different we were – he an educated Jewish man who sneaks out at night to ask Jesus, me a Samaritan woman who is considered an outsider in her own community, who never seeks Jesus out, but whom it seems seeks her out.

Despite my issues, I am no idiot, I know some things about the Jewish faith and I also know a bit about why we are in conflict with them. I know that the Jews are waiting for a Messiah to come and liberate them. I know that they think they should worship God in the Temple, we think we should worship God on the mountain.

So, we dialogue a bit about this living water, seems like it is not physical water he is talking about, but spiritual water, about how he gives that which might help our spiritual thirst, our spiritual longing. Could he be a prophet? Before I know it, he is

asking me another question, a question I had dreaded – go and get your husband, how do I answer that? I decide that honesty is the best policy and tell him that I have no husband. Before I can explain he starts telling me about my life, about all those husbands and how the man who I live with now is not my husband. Clearly, he knew a lot about me, although he was just being frank, no sense of judgement or shaming me. So, I state the obvious, clearly you are a prophet.

Before I know it, I am talking about theology, about where or where not one should worship God. His response was interesting, it is not where you worship but how you worship that is important. Then I bring up the Messiah idea, the one for whom the Jews waited. He then tells me that he is the one!

Blew my socks off! His friends were returning and bit surprised that we were talking, but I didn't care, I didn't care anymore, I need to go back to town and tell everyone what had happened.

Left my jar and all, bit odd that I forgot the thing I had gone there for in the first place. Even odder that I couldn't wait to get back to town to tell everyone, tell the people who did nothing but judge me about it all, I didn't care what they thought anymore either. This man had changed my life and they needed to come and meet him too, and listen to him and see for themselves what they thought about him, who they thought he was and what they were going to do about that. You know what, they did, they came and sought him out, and were so intrigued by him that they invited him to stay in town for a few days, so they could ask their questions. He did and many of them became believers.

Over the years I have reflected many times on my encounter with Jesus. He never judged me, he only ever treated me with gentleness and dignity. What's more he encouraged me to talk about God, to talk theology – that rarely happened in my day – women allowed to talk theology! He changed my perspective in so many ways, I became a follower, followed him all the way to the cross and beyond.

I hope they remember my story. A story where boundaries are broken down by God, a story where people are shown to treat others with dignity and respect and to not judge. A story where an encounter with God leaves you changed and gives you a new task – to share all you have discovered with others, even those who do not like you.

They may never know my name, but that doesn't matter, they will know my story, my story of the day Jesus the Christ met a vulnerable woman in the middle of the day and not only changed her life, but also the lives of many in her community.