

The Samaritan Woman Quiz

John 4:4-29

Woman at the Well

MAR 7 1999

Lent 2A

A man and a woman meet at the well. This is actually a familiar story line in the Bible, because it happens at least four times. It seems very predictable. If it was a movie scene, we would see a man and a woman approaching a well from two different directions. We would be able to predict - instantly - the likely outcome of the movie from that single scene. I want to test this theory, with a quiz.

1. Isaac waits at the well ... for what?

- (a) His escaped horse to return with the missing bag of silver coins.
- (b) His father Abraham to bring lunch from the nearby village.
- (c) A beautiful young woman to get him a drink, and to get married.
- (d) To buy a nearby field to grow wheat for trade with Egyptians.

In the first story, found in Genesis, Isaac waits by the well for a drink. Isaac prays that when the young women of the village come to get water, the one who offers a drink to him will become his wife. It is Rebecca who approaches Isaac with a cup of water. They agree to get married on the spot.

2. The women can't move the heavy lid on the well. Who will?

- (a) Their patient, but strong mother who arrives unexpectedly.
- (b) Jacob, with hormones fired up, tosses that lid aside like a Frisbee.
- (c) A camel wanders by, and they harness it with a rope to pull it off.
- (d) The ancient spirit in a nearby tree, secretly moves it off.

In the second story, a group of women wait by the well for someone strong enough to remove the stone lid covering the top of the well. Jacob is so moved by Rachel's beauty, his hormones kick in, and he's able to lift that heavy lid all by himself. Eventually, they get married as well.

3. Brigands set upon seven sisters at the well. What happens?

- (a) 7 heavenly angels defend them, the sisters build a temple there.
- (b) God gives them magic power, the brigands are turned into pigs.
- (c) Moses, nearly dead, chases them away; then marries a sister.
- (d) Cavalry from Jerusalem arrives, they build a fort around the well.

In the third story, Moses comes to the well after a long tortuous journey across the Sinai desert only to find seven sisters being harassed by some shepherds. Though near his death from thirst, he finds the strength to chase off all the attackers single-handedly. And what happens? Zipporah, the oldest sister, and Moses get married.

4. The Samaritan woman sees a strange man by the well. Then?

- (a) She offers him a drink, they fall in love and get married.
- (b) He recites poetry, she is transformed into a beautiful princess.

- (c) With muscles bulging he pulls up the bucket. she swoons.
- (d) Though their love is forbidden by local custom, they remain true.

The fourth story happens at the same place that the second story occurred. Jesus takes a rest by the well that to this day is still called Jacob's well. The story begins when Jesus asks a Samaritan woman to get him a drink of water from the well to quench his thirst. By the end of the story, it is the woman who is asking Jesus for water to quench her thirst, asking for the *LIVING WATER* that will soothe the thirst in her troubled soul once and for all.

5. What is the "living water" that Jesus offers the woman?

- (a) Water that is only served in bowls or cups blessed by rabbis
- (b) Water that flows energetically like a stream or fountain (not water that lies still)
- (c) A spiritual gift from God that satisfies every thirst in the heart
- (d) Something almost unimaginable to people living in a desert

And isn't that what we seek? The living water, not the stuff in a glass that quenches our thirst on a hot day, but the living water which soothes our soul and heals our heart. There are a lot of things that we try to cure the thirst, but many of them just increase the thirst, and fail to soothe the soul. Food, alcohol, drugs, sex, power, weapons. Enough of this dead, stagnant water, we seek the living water of Jesus Christ.

The first three stories of Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, are stories of love at first sight. And, in fact, the fourth story plays with that same theme, for as they set their eyes on one another, both the Samaritan woman and Jesus remembered those earlier stories. What would each of them find in the stranger approaching the well .. a cup of water ... true love ... or something more?

There is much more complexity to the story, and the outcome of the story is less certain. For one thing, Samaritans and Jews had no dealings with one another. So it is hard for Jesus and the woman to share that cup of water because according to their respective religious laws neither one could drink from the other's cup. How can Jesus and the woman form any kind of relationship with one another, when by their own laws they must act as if the other does not exist? So in this story there is no possibility of friendship, of sharing, only the frustration and pain of separation.

The story is complicated, as well, because of the woman's particular circumstances. It can't be an old fashioned love story because the woman is already married. In fact she's been married five times, and now she is living with another man who is not her husband. Which means that there is a second separation in this story, by the difficulty of her life, a bad reputation – whether deserved or not – by her reputation the woman is separated from her own people.

Given these two forms of separation, between Jews and Samaritans, and between the woman and her neighbors, it seems that pursuing this conversation would be pointless, meaningless, hopeless. This relationship is going nowhere.

But a curious word surfaces. The word is salvation. And with the expression of that word the Samaritan woman and Jesus find that they have something very much in common. Salvation is our assurance that God loves us, accepts us, forgives us and heals of the sin that plagues our lives. And Jesus explains, that salvation is what the living water is all about. The woman was asking about water, but she was really asking about salvation, salvation across the board. She had no water. She had no husband. Salvation covers it all.

In fact, this is not a movie plot, with an easily predictable ending. It's a story from real life, with all of the complexity and complication that can be found in your life and mine, and it doesn't end with true love, it ends with two strangers finding common ground in their desire to rise above the problems of this world.

The story of the woman at the well is an encouraging moment for us. It shows us that our lives need not be perfect in order for Jesus to take an interest in who we are and what we struggle with. It even reveals that people whose lives might be considered a complete mess are offered the living water, the chance for salvation.

6. Does the woman accept the "living water"?

- (a) She is confused: "Why are you even talking to me?"
- (b) She is skeptical: "You don't have the equipment to get it"
- (c) She is curious: "Are you someone even greater than Jacob?"
- (d) She is desirous: "Give me some of this water"

Well? What do you think?

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