

Week 3

Transforming Lives: how is Jesus changing us?



Jesus and a woman at a well – John 4:5-30, 39-42

Jesus asks a woman for a drink of water and she finds her life completely changed.

Welcome and Icebreaker

Everyone is welcomed and this week's session is introduced.

Place on the table a jug of water and enough glasses for every member of the group, but do not serve the water.

- What's your favourite drink and where would you like to be drinking it?!

(10 minutes)

Reading – John 4:5-30, 39-42 ¹¹

This reading will work well with three voices – different people taking the roles of narrator, Jesus and the woman. The three sections will be discussed later.

Narrator: ⁵In Samaria Jesus came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw some water.

Jesus: Give me a drink of water.

Narrator: His disciples had gone into town to buy food.

Woman: You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan – so how can you ask me for a drink?

Narrator: Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.

Jesus: If only you knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water.

Woman: Sir, you haven't got a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?

Jesus: All those who drink this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life.

Woman: Sir, give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water.

Jesus: ¹⁶Go and call your husband, and come back.

Woman: I haven't got a husband.

Jesus: You are right when you say you haven't got a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth.

Woman: I see you are a prophet, sir. My Samaritan ancestors worshipped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God.

Jesus: Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but

we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is.

- Woman: ²⁵I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.
- Jesus: I am he, I who am talking with you.
- Narrator: At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, "What do you want?" or asked him, "Why are you talking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there:
- Woman: Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?
- Narrator: So they left the town and went to Jesus. Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there two days. Many more believed because of his message, and they said to the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world."

Valued and needed (verses 5 to 15 – 30 minutes)

- Talk about what strikes you in this encounter. What do you think is unusual or intriguing in the story?

Give out copies of the picture of the woman by Fr. Jim Hasse.

Read out the reflection 'She had Five Husbands' and consider the picture as it is read. ¹²

She had five husbands

But she also has a water vessel and the well was deep.

Jesus was tired and needed a drink.

The Samaritan woman slept late.

She needed more than another husband.

She called Jesus Jew,

then Sir,

then Prophet,

then Messiah.

Jesus needed her water vessel.

Jesus needed her to tell the town to come to Jesus as their Saviour.

Jesus accepted her with all her faults.

Fr. Jim Hasse



Discuss two or three of these questions:

- What does the picture say to you about the woman?
- Jesus asked the woman for something. Why should this be so surprising?
- What might Jesus need from you... ?
- What do you need from Jesus... ?

Living water

Experiencing the living water is about both giving and receiving, a generous mutual exchange. The following passage by Archbishop Rowan Williams¹³ makes this point – we all need each other.

The Samaritan woman is surprised to be asked: an enemy from over the border is putting himself, even if only in a small way, at her mercy for a moment, saying, 'I need your generosity'.

Jesus the Jew says to the Samaritan, 'I have need of you'. In a world where Jews and Samaritans normally speak and behave as if they do not need one another, the only thing that can break the deadlock is this confession of need.

The very first thing we should take from this story is the deeply challenging revelation that true communion begins when someone acknowledges need.

Archbishop Rowan Williams

Discuss

- What, in your experience, helps break down barriers between people?

Coming clean (verses 16 to 24 – 20 minutes)

The living water cleanses as well as relieving thirst. When we meet Jesus we may have to 'come clean' about ourselves...

The woman demands the living water, but first Jesus has other things for her to face.

Read the following extract from 'Waiting for Jesus' by Hilary Faith Jones¹⁴.

She struggled for breath –
and stepped forward.
I have no husband.
The truth exploded inside her,
split and splintered her.
His voice came,
oh, so gently.

I know; he whispered again
and again.
I know.

A great heavy wave of forgiveness
broke over her,
filled her,
moved through her.

And eventually,
she looked straight at him
and her eyes were clear of the past.
Why was this man so full of the unexpected?

As reflective music is played, ponder this in silence:

- Does meeting Jesus bring me to this same point of honesty?
- What might he want me to 'come clean' about?

A large glass bowl of water is placed in the middle of the room. Everyone is given a sterilising tablet and pen or pencil and invited, privately, to write on it what they need to 'come clean about'. When they are ready, each person places their tablet in the bowl of water and watches it dissolve.

Keep a short period of silence before the prayers.

Prayers

'God is Spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.'

Let us pray for the transforming truth of Jesus and the transforming presence of the Spirit in the offering of the whole of our lives as an act of worship.

Short spoken prayers can be offered here, or prayer in silence, or any or all of the following may be used.¹⁵

Spirit of truth,

whom the world can never grasp,
touch our hearts
with the shock of your coming;
fill us with desire
for your disturbing peace;
and fire us with longing
to speak your uncontainable word
through Jesus Christ.

Christ our companion,

you came not to humiliate the sinner
but to disturb the righteous.
Welcome us when we are put to shame,
but challenge our smugness,
that we may truly turn from what is evil,
and be freed, even from our virtues,
in your name.

God of intimacy,

You surround us with friends and family
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to cherish and to challenge.

May we so give and receive caring in the details of our lives
that we also remain faithful to your greater demands
through Jesus Christ.

God of wholeness,

you have created us bodily,
that our work and faith may be one.
May we offer our worship from lives of integrity;
and maintain the fabric of this world with hearts that are set on you,
through Jesus Christ.

Witness (verses 25 to 30, 39 to 42 – 20 minutes)

Discuss

- Go back to the story, when the woman returned to her village. Why do you think the people believed her testimony?
- What is there in your life that would convince people to believe in Jesus?
- What is there in your church that would convince people to believe in Jesus?

Think and pray, and maybe discuss this with your neighbour in the group. Then write down one thing in your personal life and one thing at your church that you can work on to make your Christian witness more credible over the coming months.

Closing worship

Everyone in turn goes to the table, pours some water from the jug into a glass, and offers it to someone else in the group with the words 'God's gift of living water'.

All drink the water (and join hands) to say The Grace.