

# An Inexhaustible Spring for All

Two children fighting, but it's not really just a story about two children, is it? The ideas are childish; I am better than you; I don't like you because you are different. And the gods they believed in were as immature and insecure as the children: my god loves me but not you; my god will punish you, my god will kill you. They will not allow themselves to be changed by God; they change their definition of God to justify their hatred toward others. This is not just a play but a reflection of what we have seen in our shameful human history – discord between different nations, different religions, and different cultures - even different theologies within a faith community. What do you think the two children of God need to do to come to a happy ending?

In today's Bible reading, we see another encounter between two children of God, but this story has a happier ending. When Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee, he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph centuries before. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, sat by the well and met a Samaritan woman who came to draw water. Here we see an interesting meeting between two people from different communities: one is from a Samaritan community and the other is from a Jewish community. As the Bible points out, Jews avoided sharing things with Samaritans. Their communities were separate, their places of worship were separate, and even their gods lived in separate places, so face-to-face meetings between Samaritans and Jews were very rare. Both communities claimed that they worshiped the one true God, and believed that God dwelled only where they worshiped – for Samaritans it was on Mount Gerizim and for Jews it was in Jerusalem. The place of worship justified their beliefs, and they treated each other based on their beliefs.

Of the two groups, the Jews had more power because they had their formidable Jerusalem temple, and it was the Jews who established a hostile attitude toward the Samaritans because of their intermarriage with other ethnic groups. Each side had a list of their rights and the other's wrongs, but lists just build grievances – they never help. What is important is to break down the wall that divides the two communities. Someone from within the communities has to start communicating to find their common ground. There was a lot of common ground between the Samaritans and the Jews - the well where Jesus sat was one of the things that they had in common, inherited from the same ancestors. Both groups also shared the same Scriptures, the forerunner of the first five books of the Bible, and they shared a painful history – Israel,

the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyrians, and Judea, the southern kingdom was conquered by Babylonians.

When Jesus started talking with the woman, he spoke of the commonest need. "Give me a drink." Notice that it is Jesus who is thirsty, and that it is the woman who has the pitcher. But as their dialogue goes deeper it becomes clear that it is the woman who is thirsty, and it is Jesus who has the pitcher. The point is that both of them are thirsty, and they need each other's help. And in order for them to be helped out, they first need to recognize their thirst, their emptiness. So Jesus' request for water was actually an invitation for the woman to acknowledge her need. She needed to open her door to the stranger, as much as Jesus opened his door to his stranger. The two strangers' openness and honesty make them friends; Jesus becomes Messiah for her and the woman becomes a messenger for Jesus. Their work together is what God wants them to do; the good news spreads to her community and they all come to know that Jesus is truly the Saviour of the world.

This story reminds us that great movements start with small things like an ordinary conversation; "Give me a drink". Someone told me that when she was new to this town, the neighbour across the street came to her house with an empty mug in her hand, saying "I am your neighbour. It's time for us to meet, please give me a cup of coffee." That was the start of their first conversation, the beginning of their strong friendship. An opportunity for change is always there, but we need to be humble to get the opportunity. And our humbleness is expressed with a simple question, "What can I learn from you?" rather than, "What can I do for you?"

While I was writing my sermon, I was thinking about us and the relationship between you, Ladysmith First United Church and me. It is still amazing for me that you called me to work with you as your minister. As you know, before coming to Ladysmith, I was working at a Korean church in the Lower Mainland. But truthfully, I found more similarities between you and I than between myself and the Korean church. Maybe that's because both of our doors are wide open to new possibilities. We each reach our hands out to each other and to the world beyond our comfort zone. We each recognize our emptiness and our thirst that can only be filled with God's spirit and grace. Our conversation has just begun with our need, "Give me a drink". And it will lead us to a deeper conversation, deeper relationship, and a deeper commitment to do what God really wants us to do. God is here with us as an inexhaustible spring for us all. There will always be more to drink, there will always be more to say, here together, children of the same God, who loves and blesses us all.