

Bucket List

Romans 5:1-11 John 4:5-42

Slide: Time Flies

Time flies, doesn't it? I *could have sworn that just yesterday, I was renting my first place to live in, buying my first car (which was actually a Nissan truck), and being single. Stretching my mind way back to this now, it was a short time after college and before I got married, but still, that whole adulting thing was exciting and, well, really awkward. I remember leaning on my mother for a lot of assistance and also on this wonderful man I was dating at the time.

Slide: Cleaning Supplies

It was not the world of Lysol wipes in the early 1990's. So, when first out of the dorm and into a rental, even with roommates, I remember getting essentials, the first was a bucket. I know pretty mundane, right? But, look, is there any house without one? If you wanted to clean anything in those days, you used a

bucket to mop with and clean with. Today, that should still be the norm even though we have all those new gadgets, nothing beats water, detergent, and a mop.

Buckets have many uses. They hold things. They help you garden, clean and carry water. And, in certain areas of the world, they are lifesaving. In parts of Africa, women carry buckets to wells that are sometimes miles away because other water sources are not sustainable for human drinking. And, in today's Gospel reading, this woman who is a Samaritan also knows the value of a bucket. It's even possible that this very special well is the only well in her town.

You know, it's important when we read the Gospel of John to see more than the physical story itself. True enough, it's clear that Jesus had a very transformative, socially and culturally unheard of conversation with a woman who likely was unclean by Jewish standards and also a woman of disregard in her own community. That alone is

worth talking about any time we hear this striking, remarkable story about an everyday woman in the hottest time of the day who encounters the Living God.

But, along with the very tangible storyline here, we also have a deep spiritual element to it, some of it metaphorical, but much of it is meant to stir deeply within, specifically, within those that Jesus gives this deep, clear, clean, Living Water to. Today, I really don't want to miss that part of the story.

Slide: Jesus and Purell

Therefore this week, amidst the swirling of the coronavirus scare, deep within the depths of anxiety for our economy, for the dramatic halting of events around the world, all while we attempt to live our normal lives which already have both riches and difficulties imbued within, I'm finding myself at a deep well with no bucket. How can I possibly reach that water, that Living Water without Christ?

So today, I hear this woman's voice in larger ways when I am facing a situation that exceeds my human abilities alone to address. Maybe you are. Maybe you have too much at work and worry about if you have sick leave. Maybe you live with illness already. Maybe you are grieving, or in pain, or addicted, or apathetic about everything. Maybe you are a healthcare worker and are already overstretched. The well is too deep and you have no bucket.

"You have no bucket and the well is deep," says this Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, not knowing that Jesus is the only one who can quench her spiritual thirst.

Slide: The Gospel of John

New Testament scholar *Alan Culpepper talks about how the Gospel of John has two layers – the literal and the spiritual. Those who do not accept Jesus or have trouble understanding Jesus are the ones who do not recognize Jesus spiritually. These recognition stories are many in

this Gospel – the encounter of Nicodemus who cannot understand being born from above, the healing of the crippled up man who refuses to heal after his physical malady is removed, the healing of the blind man who spiritually sees Jesus as the Son of God while the Pharisees are spiritually blind to the truth – all these encounters of Jesus show us whether or not people are able to recognize Jesus as more than the physical man in front of them, but also as the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Living God Incarnate among them.

This dualism is everywhere in the Gospel, even at the Resurrection, where Mary Magdalene doesn't recognize Jesus at first as risen. Seeing beyond the literal story we see instead a transformational recognition of who Jesus is. He is the only one to bring the deep spiritual help we all encounter, even when we may not describe it or intuit it as spiritual – it actually is. Do we recognize Christ at our well when it's too deep for us to find help and we have no bucket?

Slide: Booker T. Washington

Renowned African American educator Booker T. Washington loved to tell the story about a small ship in the South Atlantic Ocean that signaled another ship not far from them: "Help! Save us, or we perish for lack of water!" The captain of the other ship's reply was "Cast down your buckets where you are."

Supposing that the second captain had gotten the message wrong, they signaled 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, desperate for water, having nothing to lose, followed what they thought was ridiculous advice. When they cast down their buckets, they drew up clear, cool, river water from the mouth of the Amazon. They didn't know that the powerful current of the great Amazon River carried fresh water from the rain forests many miles out into the South Atlantic.* *

Slide: The Well is Deep

Where is it in your life right now that your bucket is empty and the well is deep? It's to that well where Jesus comes to be with you, to walk alongside with you as the Messiah, the Living One of God, the one who gives Living Water, a Fountain of Life flowing into your life and into the world. Jesus longs to help you when you are empty and when your life is full, too. He longs to give you life and to be in conversation with you.

One last observation on today's Gospel reading. Did you notice that when Jesus told this woman at the well that he was the Messiah, the one who gives this Living Water, she ran to tell everyone, but in doing so, she left her bucket behind? This again is a metaphor of the spiritual life. She had found what she needed for her life in the person of Jesus Christ and no longer had need what she carried with her for her believed in survival, at least spiritually speaking.

Slide: Faith bigger than fear

In today's fearful world, we have something stronger than fear. We have a faith that surrounds us and holds us together, calm in the storm, and a balm during times of disease and strife. Cling on to that in times of good and bad. Trust in the Lord even now, and rely upon the Living Water, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Alan Culpepper, "The Plot of John's Story of Jesus," - from Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 1995
**Story from Alyce McKenzie "Biblical Wisdom in a Self Help Society" 2002