

Those of us who talk about Christianity are inclined to deal with abstractions. We ~~spark~~^{Speak} of issues, ideas, concepts, etc. So we may give the impression that Christianity is just a ~~very definite~~ good idea, a happy thought, more than a concrete personal encounter and daily decision.

But the Bible doesn't talk that way. It has a lot to say about people and less about ideas. It is crammed with incidents, human relationships, human events. It names names and tells what happens.

There is one such encounter at Jacob's well. Let us, as we hear the scripture read and its ~~expos~~ commentary, see if we cannot be drawn into the conversation which takes place. Faith begins and continues with this kind of dialogue with Christ.

THE READING IS JOHN 4:6-30; 39-42

"Jacob's well ^{was} ~~with~~ there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour" Jesus was tired and resting beside the well. He had traveled perhaps most of the day thru Galilee ~~thru~~ from Judea. He had sent his disciples into ^{town to} ~~buy~~ some food after they had arrived at Jacob's well outside Syccar.

The scripture continues:

12

A There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her 'Give me to drink'. That's how this conversation begins - with the request 'Give me a drink'. And that is a bit of a surprise. In those days a man did not start a casual conversation with a woman. And the last thing this woman expected when she came to the well was to find herself talking about God. But she soon would be. Jesus ignores the social taboos when he had something to say. And we may discover that we may find him talking to us when we have not the slightest intention of being religious. The woman had come for some water--to carry out a daily chore--and suddenly she is talking to Christ.

Give me a drink, he begins with a simple request. He did not say: "Sister, are you saved" or "Let me straighten your life out for you" No, just 'give me a drink". The conversation had begun.

Then the scripture continues:

a { The Samaritan woman said to him "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria'. For the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

Now the woman tries to put up a barrier. It is the kind of defense we throw up when we try to re-

sist Christ. The woman abruptly raises what we might call the race issue. "What, you a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?" That's the ugly thing that had poisoned the relationship of the Jews and Samaritans for a long time. And this woman simply expected Jesus to be prejudiced against her. She thought this Jew would dislike her because of the accident of her birth. But Jesus is not deterred from the central point. The scripture goes on:

10 Jesus answered her "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying unto you 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Now the woman's curiosity is aroused. If she only knew what God gives? Who is this man? What is living water? She is changed from the defense stage to the questioning stage of the encounter and the conversation. Who is this man? That's a question we all have to ask.

Then verse 11 reads"

11-12 The woman said to him 'Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"

She seems to be saying: how can you draw water when you have nothing to draw with. Where do you get this living water? Are you greater than Jaob? Isn't this well - belonging to Jacob, and serving all these years-good enough for you? Jesus simply goes on as the scripture notes:

13-14 { "Jesus said to her 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life'"

What do you make of those words. The woman seems to sense that Jesus has a wonderful gift for her, something that would make a difference in her life. But she wasn't ready to have her life changed. And so she tries to make light of what Jesus is trying to say. She becomes a bit flippant so that she won't have to face herself; As she says in the next verse:

15 { The woman said to him "Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst, and not have to come back here to draw water"

The woman tries to make this offer of divine life seem like a kind of trick. And she took him too literally. And anyone can grab a piece of a religious expression and make it sound like a lot

of nonsense. That is one of the ways she ^{tried 5} ~~tried~~ to fight off the challenge of God. And we do the same

To continue the reading:

16-17a { "Jesus said to her 'Go, Call your husband and come here"'. The woman answered him, 'I have no husband'.

Jesus gives the conversation a totally unexpected twist. And the woman is startled. They were just about to get into a theological debate. Talking religion and arguing various points and beliefs while interesting is not a very good way of convicting. And she had to be a little amazed when Jesus suddenly inserted an irreverant intrusion into her personal life, "Go get your husband". And she could only indignantly reply, "I have no husband".

To pick up the reading at middle of the 17th verse"

17b-18 { "Jesus said to her, "you are right in saying 'I have no husband', for you have had five husbands, and him whom you now have is not your husband; this you truly say".

Now, then, the real problem appears, it comes out in the open. What needed sorting out was not a legal and theological problem, but a moral one.

A conversation with Christ is often not so much a mental struggle in which we try to come to terms with his claims, as it is a moral struggle in which we resist this light that comes to strike right into the hidden places of our lives.

But the woman is not quite ready to face up to her condition, as we note in the reading: 19-19-20

19-20 The woman said to him "Sir I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship God".

She tries to divert the conversation back to a theological level, and raises what we might call the denominational issue. This was the old point of contention between the Jews and the Samaritans - the correct location of the temple. For far less important matters Christians have split themselves into groups, rival groups. The woman was in effect saying "You religious people are all divided. So how can I make up my mind?"

But Jesus is not going to be diverted:

21-24 Jesus said to her "Woman believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father, You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming

and now is, when the true worshiipers will worship ⁽⁷⁾ the father in spirit and truth, for the father seek such to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him. must worship him in spirit and truth."

Jesus doesn't lose his patience when she tries to divert him. He knows her need, and wants her to know his Father and the power that God can give. It's strange, isn't it, that one of our Lord's most profound teaching - one which has echoed for centuries - was first given in a casual conversation with an apparently immoral and irreligious woman by the side of a well? That's the way it is with Jesus. We don't need theological training, we don't need to clean ourselves up, we don't need to be religious before we can meet God in Christ.

Now, the conversation moves it its climax as we see as the reading continues:

25-26
The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he".

I am he, I am the one you have been looking for I am the one who has brought God to you, the one who brings you to God, the one who gives direction to your life, the one who sorts out moral confusion.

the one who has a job for you to do in this world of fear and prejudice and divisions. "I am he".

Let us ^{continue} finish our scripture reading: (8)

27-30
"Just then the disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said ^{what} 'what do you wish', or 'why are you talking to this woman'. So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, 'Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the city and were coming to him".

So the disciples have come back from town and the gospel writer merely makes note of that. But the woman was overwhelmed with her discovery, she ^{did} what most of us are scared to do. She went right back to the town where her reputation was known, and told them about Christ. ~~A little later in the same chapter of John it is written~~

Our Scripture skips several verses now and we pick it up at the 39th verse:

39-42
Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony "He told me all that I ever did'. So when the Samaritans came to him they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many believed because of his word.

They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this indeed is the Savior of the world'".

Now this is where we come in. We have been eavesdropping on a conversation. Hopefully as we have eavesdropped we have been having our own conversation with Christ.

Most of us have some second hand knowledge of the Lord, thru our parents, our friends, our teachers, the church. What matters is that we reach the point of saying "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard him for ourselves and we know that this is in truth the Savior of the world".

This is not an idea that we are confronted with. What we are confronted with is a person. And he asks us, knowing us as well as he did the woman at the well,, the question that he ~~ask~~ asks to all who would be his disciples: "Who am I . . . who do you say that I am?" With Peter perhaps we are ready now to affirm "You are the Christ, the son of the living God"

Lord we believe; help our unbelief.