

John 4: Woman at the Well
Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church
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Imagine being a parent who cannot provide a home for your own child. Imagine what sorrow you must have experienced to be in this position at all. And imagine the strength and the courage it would take to go get help, to provide all you possibly can in spite of the obstacles you face.

One of our Mary's Place volunteers had the chance to witness that strength – that profound love – recently while we had mothers and children as our guests recently. Our volunteer walked into the bathroom to brush her teeth, and came upon a three-year-old child standing in our bathroom sink.

The child was being tenderly held and washed by its mother. She scooped small handful after small handful of precious water onto her child, lathering him with hand soap bubbles. Our Mary's Place volunteer had a lump in her throat, and so did I, as she told this story. Because that was a sacred moment. A moment of tenderness. A moment of selfless, life-giving love.

The child, whose only needs are shelter, food, health, and love – was given all of that by his mother who washed him clean in our little sink.

In one way or another, isn't that what we all come here for? Aren't we all just longing for God to see our need and care for us?

We long to be held and cared for in such a tender way. I know...I'm getting a little sappy here. And I know you are tough people. I know many of you are proud and strong. You are hard-working and independent and self-sufficient.

You are not unlike that strong woman who met Jesus at the well. Don't underestimate her – she was no push-over or victim. No, she was ready to go head to head with Jesus in conversation.

Yes, we are tough people like she is. We like to think we can handle everything on our own.

But let's be honest, even on our best days, I think what we all have in common is our need to be noticed. To know that our life matters so someone else. And that's true throughout our lives, no matter who we are or where we come from.

Like the Israelites, we journey by stages through this life.

When we are children we long for our parent's approval.

When we are adolescents we long for our peers to accept us.

When we are teens and young adults we long to prove our worth and our usefulness.

When we are middle aged we long for our unique voice to be heard.

And as we age we long for our life and our legacy to make a lasting difference in the world.

We journey by stages, but our longing to be noticed and valued never changes.

So here, during Lent, we have placed the font front and center. It represents that thirst. And it represents the truth that God notices us. God chooses to come close to each of us, across the barriers we put up around ourselves, and the barriers put up against our will.

And like her does with the woman at the well, Jesus sees past all those barriers, and past our tough exteriors and our polite, proper personas that we show the world. He sees the truth about us. Just as he saw the truth about her.

Jesus asks the Samaritan woman about her husband and she nonchalantly answers that she has no husband. Now that's not a lie. But it's the easy answer. It's the answer you'd give a stranger at a water cooler if they said, "Hey. How are you?"

I mean how many times a day are we asked that general questions? "How are you?" In reality, you might actually be torn up inside. You might be grieving or angry or worried or ridiculously stressed out. But usually in these water cooler encounters, we don't go into all that. We just say something like, "I'm fine. How are you?"

But Jesus shows that he notices more. He wants the truth. He wants a *real* relationship.

Have you ever met a person like that? Someone who looks into your eyes and asks, genuinely, "How are you *really* doing?" I don't know about you, but when that happens to me I get a lump in my throat. Because being really seen and really cared for, is a powerful thing.

That what Jesus does for the woman at the well. He surprises her with a genuine interest in her. He sees her. He knows her. And he invites her, and all of us, into a real, life-giving relationship.

That's what Jesus does when he meets us at the well of baptism. And that's why we keep this font here – to remember this ongoing invitation.

So we touch this water and mark our bodies with it. Sometimes we even throw it at you while you're standing in your pews. Each time we do this, we remember that invitation to be in relationship with Jesus. We remember that God first chose to come to us; to know us by name; to really see our sin and hurt and need, and love us anyway.

This water is not magic. We get it from the sink in the sacristy each week. But it's infused with the promise of God's unrelenting love. It's infused with Jesus' invitation to all those who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.

That's why, when I come to this font and I splash water on my face, I feel a relief that gives me a lump in my throat.

When I come to the table and hear, "The body of Christ, given for *you*." I get that same lump in my

throat. Because I know who I am. And if God knows too, and loves me anyway, well that's pretty amazing. That hits me at my core.

It reminds me of that mother washing her son in a sink. It reminds me of my own mother's cool hands on my face when I had a fever.

Through this water and this meal, Jesus, too, wants to refresh and feed and care for us.

And what does he ask of us in return? Only that we might do the same for one another. That we might *notice* one another and recognize their God-given value! That we would show respect and love to others in the very same ways he would.

He challenges us to come close to one another, even across barriers. To have truthful conversations in which we actually listen; to forgive and help and build one another up.

That's why, at our Easter Vigil, we have this wonderful ritual of the water procession. It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever witnessed.

In the water procession, every person in this assembly is invited to bring their own vessel full of water and pour it into the baptismal pool. In doing this, we acknowledge this amazing truth that our own bucket has been filled.

We have been seen and known and loved, and so we pour that abundant love into the lives of others. We pour it out, so that God's love might spill out of our lives and into the lives of others. So all people will know the good news that they too are tenderly loved and washed with forgiveness, and claimed as God's children.

Today, come to the font and feel the cool, cleansing love of this water on your face. Be refreshed. Be blessed. And go and do likewise. Amen.