

Will You Give Me a Drink?
John 4:5-30, 39-42
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
March 12, 2023
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Not only do we often ask wondering questions with our children, but Pastor Kara and others, like Maggie today, invite the children to wonder about the stories we hear. In addition to thinking about these questions or saying them aloud, we have been inviting our children to add questions to our “wondering wall” this Lenten season.

I hope hearing those wondering questions, and for those who worship here in the sanctuary - seeing our wall of questions grow, has caused you to also start to wonder. Because wondering, asking, seeking...these are good and healthy faith habits.

So, what have you been wondering? What wondering questions does today’s story raise for you?

As I read this story this week, here are some of the questions that I’ve been wondering:

I wonder how Jesus just knew that it was okay to cross the boundaries that typically kept people in his time separated?

I wonder why we are often so eager to focus on our differences rather than our similarities?

I wonder why we are often so quick to focus on things about other people we feel suspicious of, rather than their strengths and gifts?

I also wonder how often Jesus asked others for help? And I wonder why we only tend to think of him as the one doing the helping?

I wonder what might happen if we were all a little more willing to say, “Will you give me a drink?” or “I have some to share” even to people who are different from us?

See, traditionally we read this story and we focus on what it says about the woman, what it says about Jesus, what it says about their culture. But I find myself wondering what it says about us.

Jesus asked the woman to give him a drink not just because drawing from the well was women's work, but because he had a need. Jesus offered the woman living water, not because she recognized her own need but because he had something he could share. The woman ran back to her village to tell others about her encounter because she knew that she had encountered joy and it was not hers to hoard.

And all of these things point toward the many, many ways we need one another.

I saw a quote the other day that said, "The modern condition is mostly trying to do things on your own that people have historically achieved with a large support network and wondering why you're tired all the time" (David R. MacIver @DRMacIver).

We have so many opportunities to connect with one another. And too often we walk right past them.

We miss these opportunities because we've been taught to see some people as "other."

We miss these opportunities because we're not willing to be vulnerable.

We miss these opportunities because we're scared to take a risk.

We miss these opportunities because we're too busy looking at our phones or our rules or our expectations in order to even notice those we walk by.

We miss these opportunities because we've learned to think of people as enemies, to enter interactions with our defenses up.

We miss these opportunities because we're so used to thinking of ourselves as the ones who come to help, to heal, to rebuild, that we don't leave room to receive.

I read this story and I think my favorite thing about it is that Jesus' first action is a surprise. Not only does he speak to a woman. Not only does he speak to a Samaritan. Both of these are surprising enough. But his first words are words of need, words asking for the other to help him. "Give me a drink," Jesus says.

He doesn't start by telling her what's wrong with her. He doesn't start a war over their differing understandings and religious traditions. He doesn't come in and tell her how her life can be better if she will just do it the way that he does.

Rather he comes in with vulnerability. He comes in, sharing that same common need that all of us share. He opens the door to relationship by showing his own thirst and in doing so he creates safe space for her to share hers as well.

And I think we too often miss this. Because we are so used to thinking of Jesus as Savior, or even for those with a lower Christology, we are at least used to thinking of Jesus as someone much better and more able and more connected to God than the rest of us, someone to follow and to emulate. And so, we too often forget that when Jesus entered into relationships, it meant that it wasn't just him coming in with all the answers and all the resources, but that they were mutual relationships where he not only fed others but was fed as well.

I wonder what would be different if we embraced this reality in Jesus and worked to make it ours as well? Because, friends, I know I am as guilty as the next person of being hesitant to ask for help, being hesitant to share my questions for fear of what others will think, being hesitant to accept gifts that others offer because I am used to being the one to offer rather than to receive. But I also recognize that it would be good for me and for others if I challenged myself to grow in these ways.

My grandparents used to send notes to my boys as school was about to begin, wishing them a good school year. They would usually include a small amount of money in the note, just enough for the boys to buy an ice cream cone or other treat on the first day of school. I remember one year, I think he was in first grade, when Teegan sat down and wrote a note to his great-grandparents that read something like, "Great Grandma and Grandpa, Hi! I hope you are good. Please use this to buy yourself a treat.

Love, Teegan.” He had pulled a couple dollar bills from his piggy bank and put them in the card.

These are the type of gifts that adults often hesitate to take from children. After all, we have everything we need and a dollar is a great treasure to most young children. And yet I remember knowing in that moment how important it was that my grandparents receive and accept that gift. Because it was good for Teegan to know that he had something to share. It was good for my grandparents to know that others could offer things to them. And it allowed a relationship already filled with great love to experience a new kind of mutuality.

I think Jesus knew this. He didn't just show up and help and preach and teach and change others. But he entered into real relationships, relationships of mutuality, where both parties gave and received. Even as this story ends with him staying in that Samaritan town, he not only shared with them what he had to offer, but received their hospitality and welcome as well.

What happens when we are willing to cross boundaries? What happens when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable even with people who are different from us? What happens when we stop looking at the world and at other people through a lens of need and start noticing their gifts and assets, all they have to offer to us? What happens when we don't only respond to the needs of others but let them respond to ours as well?

Maybe God's kin-dom isn't only built when we offer a cup of water, but maybe it comes about when we willingly receive one as well. Amen.