

# If you only knew...

This sermon is part of our Jefta series on **what Jesus taught us**. This morning's story is about a conversation that occurs between Jesus and a nameless woman. The story was recorded by the disciple John, and illustrates some of the most important things he discovered about Jesus:

in John 1.14: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.." message translation

in 1 John 1.1: "From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands."

John finds it essential that we know at least two things. **First**, that Jesus came to show us God's generosity and truth (John 1.14), and **second**, that it is essential that **we too** experience Jesus (1 John 1.1).

The disciples could proclaim the grace and truth of Jesus because they experienced him for 3 years. John observed how Jesus treated people in a compassionate way, and how people then put their trust in him. And **trust** is our first step in beginning to relate to God. When we trust, our hearts open to receive what he wants to give us— not only instruction (truth), but also friendship (generosity) with Him, and with each other..

The two main characters of the story are Jesus and the woman. I recently had an experience that helped me understand her better. Let me tell you about my bootcamp experience.

## bootcamp

Last week, my sister Barbara and I attended an oil-painting 'bootcamp' in which we each systematically mixed colours for three days. None of us in our row were very good at mixing colours using the palette knife. But Mike was in his own category. He spent more time wiping off oil paint globs from his hands than mixing the colours he was supposed to be mixing-- and he was getting hopelessly behind in the assignment. Added to the pressure of the assignment, my sister and I realized that we had not brought enough white paint with us. And as Barbara and I were bemoaning this, Mike said to us, 'you know, I bought a ridiculous amount of white paint in big tubes for this class. Please, use as much as you need'. That was so kind! His generosity certainly took some of the pressure off! At the start of the final day most of us were really tired, but the teacher told us that if we reached our goal, we could use the paint we had been mixing to work on a real painting! All of us liked that idea! But, looking over at Mike, I saw that he might not be able to finish the color mixing at all. The teacher was urging us to concentrate, to accomplish the task, and **not** to chat. *Just* when I felt like I had gotten into my mixing 'flow', I felt God encourage me to ask Michael a certain question. Our conversation went like this:

So, M, when you're not painting, what are you doing?	...	'I'm a musician.'
Oh, and what kind of instrument?	...	'Keyboards.'
'Oh... do you play in some kind of band, then?	...	'Yes, for some years.'
'And, do you also sing with the band?'	...	'Yes'.
'How cool... would I perhaps recognize the name of your band?'		

... 'Yes, you might. I have my own band now, but for ten years I played with ....'

'O! I'm a real fan;'

And then my sister, whose been listening to all this quietly, leaned over and said,

'you're ...?'

... 'Yes', he admitted.

Now, after he answered my first question, I had assumed that this guy was some weekend musician, and that I'd have to be diplomatic when he named his band. And some of you probably still don't know who I'm talking about, but this modest, generous person was suddenly revealed to be an extremely talented musician. (name withheld here on purpose). When Barbara and I later googled him, we saw that he didn't just **play** in the band; no, he **sang lead vocals** for them! Two of these songs are still in the top 2000 in the Netherlands.

Now, I ask you...What can a fan do with this kind of revelation? I was flummoxed. I could withdraw and give him space. I could also gush about the songs I liked best, or ask a thousand questions. What I certainly did not want to do is treat him differently just because he is famous. But then I felt God remind me that since I **had** been nice to him *before* I 'knew' who he was, I could continue to be myself. *relief*.

Let's get back to our Bible text. The 'woman at the well' doesn't have a name in this story, so she could be all of us. I invite you to imagine how you would feel. My bootcamp experience gave me some insight into what the woman at the well might have felt when she realized who Jesus was. Perhaps a few comments about similarities and differences between the bootcamp story and our Bible story might be helpful.

First, in both stories **Generosity** opens hearts In John 4, Jesus has arrived at a Samaritan village and is sitting alone outside the town by the well. It's the hottest part of the day, so no one else is there. A woman carrying a jug arrives at the well. Jesus asks her to draw him a cup of water. She then reacts rather prickly, which is understandable, given that she's a Samaritan, despised by Jews—and Jesus is obviously a Jew. She certainly has **a bit of an attitude**. When he offers her living water, she quips, 'Where's your jar? this well is deep'. In other words, 'you're not very practical.' I can relate to her. Mike's paint-smeared hands didn't make a great impression on me.

But then, in both stories, **generosity** caused a shift. Mike shared his abundance of white paint just when we needed it. This kindness jolted me out of my color-mixing isolation. The woman responds to the unexpectedly respectful attention Jesus gives her, which continues even when she's been prickly. He is being generous, not to be offended.

Jesus turns this conversation about asking for a drink of water to help her see how generous God is. He's **not** trying to get something from her. Jesus flips the question and encourages her to ask **him** for living water.

My own phrasing of what he says:

God wants everyone to know by experience how good He is. Because no one has ever seen Him, God has sent Jesus to put his full goodness on display for us. **When you begin to see God as he is**, then you'll naturally ask him to give you a drink of his living water. He's so generous that He will not only give you a drink, but will transform your life so it overflows with this living water.

The woman has observed/experienced enough of his kindness that she asks him to give her this water. And Jesus says something then which might seem totally 'random'. He says, 'go call your husband'. This opens a whole conversation in which Jesus lets her see that he knows her entirely and in great detail. Jesus has to put his finger on her 'survival strategy'; She **sees** that He sees her. They are building on truth.

As she deals truthfully with him, we can observe a few things:

- > That he already knows her and understands her, before she says anything
- > That he does not disqualify her because of her choices
- > That he is clearly continuing to offer friendship

What about us? **We** too can be with Jesus, knowing that he knows our whole story: and just like the woman, we might find it pretty uncomfortable. The woman changes the subject abruptly. And that seems to be ok with Jesus. He doesn't push her. They begin to talk about where people should worship. Jesus says that God is most interested in relating to people from the heart. So she says, 'we are waiting for the Messiah to come and He will explain everything to us.'

**And Jesus, quite unexpectedly for her, says 'I am He' = The moment of revelation**

In other words, Jesus says **he is the one** who will explain everything.

He has just explained and shown a great deal. It is **such great news** that she leaves her water jug behind as she runs into town. This jug symbolizes for me all her strategies. She leaves them in the care of Jesus. He has given her such great news that she tells everyone about what she has experienced. Let's **recap**:

- God is generous. He wants to **give** to us, **not take** from us
- Our strategies, our behaviour and choices cannot put him off us.
- He desires relationship with us from the heart
- He would like to give us the water we crave, when we trust him enough to ask him
- He wants to transform our lives with this water, so that streams flow from our lives to the world

There's one more thing she says. She asks them: 'could this be the Messiah?' Just as Jesus invited *her*, she now invites *them* to come see Jesus in action. The streams of living water are flowing already in her life, bubbling over: she is becoming reconnected with her neighbours, and she is pointing them toward the ONE who gives the living water, so they can experience for themselves.

**(photo acorns)** Look at these **photographs** of an acorn growing in this vase. The potential in this acorn was released when it came into contact with the life-giving water. It is God who makes things grow. He has created **us** with so much potential—we who are made in his image and likeness. But we need contact with Him to grow and to thrive.

A few final thoughts:

Just like the woman at the well...

- > we are all busy, sometimes just barely getting by, handling challenges and facing difficulties that drain our energy.
- > we may be confused by situations
- > we may feel overwhelmed by emotions, or afraid of things beyond our control.
- > all of us have developed all kinds of strategies to cope with life. Some strategies are useful (handgel), and others may be less healthy (in Samaritan woman's example: avoiding people because you are afraid of rejection).

Given my bootcamp experience, I can imagine a little bit of how the woman felt when Jesus told her, 'I am the Messiah who you've been waiting for.' But all other comparisons fade away there, as

**Jesus is our true hero—not only in the past but in our present and in our future**

Jesus gives hope for all humankind that we may ASK him, without fear of rejection, for living water. What a joy to be entrusted with this gift!

He is our brother and friend: the one coming close-by to us, listening and accepting us.

He is our saviour who says "I am the one, sent by the Father to help you trust God. Trust us enough now, in your situation, to ask us for living water, and we'll create springs of living water in you."