

What connects the Tearfund story about Stidia's village – with the reading about the woman of Samaria and her village? Clearly, both have to do with **water!** Although, as we shall see, there's more to it than that.

As the pastor says in the film, **You cannot live without water!** It's not just something we want on a hot day, or when we've been energetic – it's vital to life. We **all** need it. **Jesus** needed it on a hot and tiring day. The **woman** needed it – she **had** to come to the well, even though her reputation meant she avoided company and came at the hottest time of day. *The people of Stidia's village had to have water.* And since, in their culture such work was done by women and girls, it **had** to be done even at the expense of the girls' health, their loss of education, and even of their exposure to rape.

For us, water comes out of a tap, and we scarcely give it thought – except perhaps in times of drought, when we may realise that we are as dependent on rainfall meeting **our** needs, as those villagers in Uganda. Or, of course, in times of flooding, when there is danger of contamination and disease – and we suddenly become aware of the blessing of clean water! How often **do you thank God for water?!**

Jesus' disciples had left him alone by Jacob's well, while they had gone to buy food. Had he asked to be left alone, sensing that his Father had **an appointment for him to keep?** At all events, when he saw that lone woman, his heart went out to her, as he perceived her need. **He had a physical thirst – he knew she had a far deeper one.**

Jesus ignored all the conventional barriers between them to speak to her. Not for him the disdain and dislike the Jews felt for Samaritans, not for him the superiority that men felt towards women, nor the revulsion Jews felt about drinking from a Gentile vessel. *Will you give me a drink?* To reach her, **Jesus put himself in her debt,** despite her astonishment.

The need of Stidia's village is a **God-given opportunity.** For Tearfund's partner – the Diocese of Kigezi's Water and Sanitation programme, and through it, the church in Stidia's village – *and for us* who support Tearfund. **God-given,** because **he's concerned with the whole of our lives,** with **all** our needs. He's concerned for their need of an easier source of water. He's concerned for women and girls like Stidia – for their safety, their self-esteem, and the fulfilment of their potential. He's concerned too, about such things **for us,** for **our** practical needs, for employment, for accommodation, for **our** safety and health.

Today's opportunity to respond to Tearfund's work is **God-given,** because by it we express his practical love for these people. And it's an opportunity to express **our** gratitude and **our** love to God, for **all that he gives us day by day,** even if we don't recognise or acknowledge it! And by our giving to meet the needs of others, we multiply thanksgivings to God, and open the way for others to discover their spiritual needs, too.

What were the needs of this woman of Samaria? She had this daily toil of fetching water from the well, a never-ending chore. And probably the daily ostracism – of being shunned – by the other women of the village, because of her multiple divorces and present life-style. Her unsatisfactory relationships only underlined her need to be accepted, valued and loved – for herself. All she knew – **all she had ever known – was rejection.** And she had little hope that any of it could change.

Yet suddenly there was **this Jewish rabbi** talking to her in a gracious and respectful way. If she was *sarcastic* at first, she was also *intrigued.* He was offering her an endless supply of running water! Then she realises he is speaking of more than ordinary water, *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst...*

Moreover he is in earnest, and it suddenly becomes all too personal. *Go, call your husband and come back. I have no husband. You are right...you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband...*

Jesus knew that **he alone** could meet this woman's need. But he could **only** do so when she had faced up to the truth about her life, and acknowledged it – and when she had really come to see who he was. And **it's the same for us**. When Jesus meets us – as really as he met that woman – he challenges us to acknowledge **our need** too. Whatever that may be. Is there an equivalent in our life to the water which, however much it satisfies for the moment, leaves us in the end still thirsty?

Then Jesus is saying to us – **You have not yet found the true purpose and goal of your life**. *You will never have lasting fulfilment and satisfaction, until you seek it in me. I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly. Whoever is thirsty, let him or her come to me, and drink. Take the free gift of the water of life. For I am the Way, the Truth and the Life – there is no other.*

How did the woman react? As most of us do, when Jesus challenges us. She acknowledged he was right. *I can see that you are a prophet... a man who told me everything I ever did*. But then **she took evasive action**. She fell back onto the solid ground of the realities that surrounded her, the state of affairs that defined her life as a Samaritan. *Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem*. Of course, she could have been bitter. *Our fathers offered to help you Jews rebuild your temple in Jerusalem – but you refused to let us! So we built our own temple here, and worshipped in it. Until you came and destroyed it!*

We too fall back readily on the facts we are certain about, even if they are bitter. We feel unready to commit our lives unreservedly to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We're ready to acknowledge **our blessings**, and **to give God thanks** for them, but we hesitate to trust Jesus completely, letting go our reliance on our own abilities, being willing to go out on a limb for him if he asks us. But that is exactly what he does say: **Change your life.. Come with me...** (Mt 4:17,19 – *The Message*)

How did Jesus reply to what the woman had said to him? Did he just say, *That's a red herring, lady – don't run away from my challenge!*

No! He answers her implied question politely. But in doing so, **he opens up a vista** in front of her – a vision of a new world that he was going to bring to pass. In the future, what was going to be important, was not differences of place or outward religious practice. True worshippers are going to be free of that. What matters is **worship from the heart, based on a right relationship with God**, pleasing him by doing what he asks.

The woman tells Jesus that she'll really know about that when the Messiah comes, for he would explain everything. This time it isn't camouflage – so Jesus simply says, **I am he**. When we **genuinely** want to do God's will, he will convince us that Jesus is telling the truth about himself. (*John 7:17*)

Let's remind ourselves of Jesus' words. *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again*. We know it's **true of water** – have we found it true **of other things?** The things and promises the world around us offers? We know, too, that contaminated water brings disease and death. Do we realise that **what the world offers us does not lead to life?** Not only can it never really satisfy – it leads to dis-ease and to death.

Only Jesus can bring us eternal life. *Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Whoever drinks...* We receive no benefit unless we drink. We cannot receive eternal life until we come to Jesus, empty-handed, and ask him to come into our life, as Saviour and Lord.

In her excitement that day, the Samaritan woman *leaves behind her* the jar of water that she'd drawn up for herself, and goes to share her discovery of Jesus with her townsfolk. Many of them become believers, too, when they met Jesus. The transformation of that woman's life had already begun.

The choice is yours. Won't you ask Jesus to transform your life? **You cannot live without water!**

