

Summerland United Church

October 6 2024

Theme: The United Church Call and Vision: Deep Spirituality

Threshold This week we continue our series on the United Church of Canada's Call and Vision statement. Last week we considered the call to Daring Justice in relationship to the Church Run Residential Institutions and national day for truth and reconciliation.

This week we consider the call to Deep Spirituality and we hear the story of the Woman at the well, for whom the notion of living water would mean so very much. Sometimes the notion of 'deep' can bring up connotations of being in over our heads, yet it can also mean plunging into something of importance, going deeper into commitments we make for ourselves and communities. Deep can also be linked to abundance and perhaps an abundance unlike any we've experienced before.

Today is World Wide Communion Day, meaning that all over the globe Christian communities are gathering to share the abundance with one of our deepest of sacraments – Communion.

Scripture: John 4: 1-15

Reflection

This story of the Woman at the Well is one of the better-known stories in the bible, and in seminary we spent weeks looking at the intricacies of this story. There is an abundance of symbolism and depth of meaning in this chapter of John, we could read this story over a multitude of weeks and we wouldn't repeat a single theme. I'm not going to get into all of that today, though it's tempting, because this woman is a fascinating person. She's an outcast – being a Samaritan and she's brilliant in her ability to have this discourse with Jesus, and if we read the whole chapter we'd learn that she is quick of wit and Jesus first disciple in the book of John.

Before we get into it a little explanation of Samaritans and Jewish people. Much like how we have different Christian denominations -Lutheran, United, Anglican etc... at the time of Jesus, there were (sort of) denominations within the Jewish people as well. Samaritans did consider themselves a sect of Judaism however they did not believe that God was confined to the single temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, to the pharisees and to Temple Judaism, they were outcasts and not true Jewish people. So bear that in mind as we dig into this story a bit more.

Today I'm going focus on the line she says when Jesus asks for drink of water. First she reminds him that is completely inappropriate for him to be interacting with her. Then when Jesus turns the request around as says, 'well if you knew who I was, you'd ask me for a drink.'

She looks at him a little asquint and says, "you don't have a bucket and the well is deep – where does this living water come from?" She is no fool and will not be fooled by this man who talks in riddles and to women he's not supposed too.

The well is deep and Jesus doesn't have a bucket. Deep well imagery pervades our spiritual language. In a previous reflection, I shared words from 20th century mystic Etty Hillsum who wrote, "There is a well deep inside me and in it dwells God. Sometimes that well is full of rocks and grit and needs to be dug out again."

Deep wells are metaphors that are used through out our scriptures both Hebrew and Christian, because in a land where water is scarce wells are life.

Sometimes when I read this story I imagine a well where the surface of the water is very deep, very far away and one needs a long long rope for the bucket to reach. Sometimes this living water, this connection to Divinity can feel oh so very far away. Sometimes I don't have a bucket or a rope long enough to reach it.

I imagine that there are times in everyone's lives where this is true.

Other times I read this story and the surface of the water is close to the top of the well, easy to reach, perhaps even just scooping your hand down will break the surface of this abundance of water. It's right there, almost overflowing the top of the well with so much water I feel I will never be thirsty again.

I saw something different when I read the story this week. I've had a lot on my mind these last few weeks, the impending move, the building of new relationships with the Anglicans, world wide communion, and the saying goodbye to this building. So much change and so much flux in the level of that well – sometimes the living water of our faith has been easy to grasp and sometimes I wonder if the well has run dry.

But this is what I saw in the scripture this week. These two people, who are for all intents and purposes complete opposites, meet at a communal space. They shouldn't speak to one another, they shouldn't help one another, but they do. They look past differences and see each others common humanity and common Divinity. They have a conversation, they listen to each other – really listen – and one is moved by what the other has to say.

Jesus shares the living water with her, a person who is not a member of his, and says that everyone, everyone who wants this living water is welcome too it. The barriers between these two people drop and they bond over what truly matters – a connection to the Divinity that surrounds them and is within each of them. How they worship, be it at a temple or on a mountain top, doesn't matter because what connects them is their innate deep spirituality and the fact that they do worship. They do praise God and love God and believe God loves them. They express their faith differently, they experience their spirituality differently – but the both have it and that unites them.

So of course, what comes to mind is that in our new location we will experience a different expression of faith from our Anglican friends. They practice and express their faith differently from us. But we both come to and draw from the same deep well. And it's knowing this that will help us bond, help us break down barriers. At times, after we move, we may feel *in over our heads*, in fact I'm absolutely sure we will. And I think that it's okay, because (as I'm determined to put a positive spin on it) if we're in over our heads, it means there's an abundance of living water overflowing the well. We're plunging into something of deep importance, deep meaning and we have the opportunity for deepening our spirituality. We have the opportunity to deepen our connection within our community of faith and deepening our connections outward like ripples on a pond, or the surface of a deep well.

With this abundance we can ask ourselves – what might we plant, grow and nourish with this living water to strengthen our Deep Spirituality in our ministry in the future?