

“GIVE ME A DRINK”

John 4

My dad and his best friend would always, like two little boys, try to be one up on the other. One way they did that was by a birthday card. I do mean card. Each year they sent each other the same birthday card with the same worn one-dollar bill. They simply crossed out the most recent signature and replaced it with their own, put it in a new envelope, and sent it in the mail.

But in a more serious way we do like to be on top of situations. We feel so much more comfortable to be owed something than to owe to someone else. We are told, “It is better to give than to receive.” And that can be so true. When we give, we are in control. We much rather give something expensive to our children than have them do it to us.

So, it may seem odd to us that Jesus, the one who we think of as always giving, says first to the woman in our Gospel lesson, “Give Me a drink.” He doesn’t say to her, “I am the Messiah, the Son of God. I have come to take away your sins and give you eternal life.” That may have been true, but what would the woman’s reaction have been? Perhaps something like, “Sure, and I am the Queen of Samaria. I’m only coming to the well to get water because I want to do this as a diversion. Normally my slaves do this.”

But instead, Jesus says, “Give Me a drink.” He has journeyed a long way, it is noon, the hot time of day, and as a human like you and me, Jesus is thirsty. So, He asks for some water. But there is so much more to that which we can see in the woman’s reaction to Him. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” John, the author of this story adds, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” Why would a Jewish man have anything to do with a Samaritan? But there is more which John doesn’t even have to mention. This is also a woman. In the world of that day a decent man did not talk to a woman in public, not even his own wife. And finally, this is noon, the “sixth hour” as John calls it. Women went to the well in the morning when it was cool. Why was the woman going for water at noon? We get an answer when Jesus later says, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” This is a woman of questionable background, someone who would avoid going for water in the morning when all the other women in town would look down on her. Yet, despite all of this, Jesus asks her for a drink.

What Jesus has done is begin to break down the barriers that separated Him from this woman. By asking her for a drink, He would owe her, someone a Jew never wanted with a Samaritan. And He was risking that instead of just getting a drink of water, He would enter into a conversation, a relationship with her.

A homeless man comes up to us holding a can asking for a donation. What is easier to do, put some money in the can or stop and ask the man what is wrong? If we stop and ask, then we risk having to do what we were planning to do and listen to the man for a while. We are so much more in control of the situation if we give some money than just walk away. That way I don't have to be vulnerable. I can maintain a wall keeping me from having to be more committed. I can stay in control. They say about so many things, "It is easier to do it ourselves than to ask someone else to do it." If I try to get help, I have to take all the extra time explaining to someone else and I might not be able to have it done by my schedule.

If we ask someone for something then we risk involvement with that person. That is tough today in a world in which our most precious commodity seems to be time. We need time for our families. We need time to unwind. We need time to exercise and rest. We need time to take care of our houses, our finances, our homework, our appearance. Internationals have to get accustomed to what we mean in our culture when we pass by someone and ask, "How are you doing?" In their cultures that is an invitation to get into a conversation. But what we mean is, "I hope you are fine, but I don't have time to talk about it. So, 'Good bye.'"

But Jesus asked, "Give Me a drink." He risked getting involved with this woman. This happened even before He met her. John tells us in his Gospel that Jesus and the disciples were on their way back to their home area in Galilee from the area east of Judea where John the Baptist ministered. Even though Samaria was between Judea and Galilee, Jews often went around it to travel north or south. But Jesus and the disciples specifically went through Samaria. Why? So, Jesus could get involved in the life of the Samaritans.

That is what Jesus' whole ministry was about—getting involved with all people including you and me. He didn't come to take care of just He liked or who were close to Him. He didn't simply control the situation so that people were forced into accepting Him. He came to ask that woman for a drink. He came to make Himself vulnerable, to put Himself under all of us so He could take on Himself all of our problems, all of our sins.

That is what enables us to say, "Give me a drink," to ask of others, to risk getting involved in the lives of others. It will take time, time that we can be so protective of, some that we try to hoard so much. How can we give up that time? First we can recognize that our time is not ours, but God's gift to us. Remember the rich fool who thought he had it all figured out and had time to enjoy all the wealth he had, but lost it all when God called him to death at night. How much time is used for things like playing on the computer, working to impress others, making more money to collect things, or covering up our mistakes so we don't have to admit them? Then we realize that time spent with other people, the people God puts daily in our lives, is time used as God's gift. And putting our trust in Christ helps us to not worry so much about those things "we got to do."

Bill Cowher, who coached the Pittsburgh Steelers for 15 years, is good friends with Bill Belichick of the New England Patriots. It developed because Cowher asked Belichick for help. They were both new defensive coordinators for different teams. Cowher had experience with defensive backs, but sought out help from Belichick to coach linebackers. When we ask people, we take the risk of them, not us, being in control. But it is also how we can get more involved in their lives.

“Give me a drink.” Jesus took that ultimate risk by getting involved in all of our lives. Now we can take risks too, the risk of being vulnerable, the risk of losing some of our precious time, the risk of not being in total control. We can so as we get involved in the lives of others, He does too.