

The Magic Spring and the Divine Well
The Rev. Shari Young

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Today's sermon is about the Magic Spring and the Divine Well

THE MAGIC SPRING: Once upon a time there was an old couple who lived in a small hut by the side of great forest. They had never had children so now that they were old, it was difficult for them, but they carried on with good cheer. They missed having a child but they felt that this was God's will so they made their peace with it.

The man was a wood-cutter and would go into the woods and find ways to cut and bring the wood home without help even though he was old. The woman would carry water and do the heavy chores on her own. Nevertheless, they both were full of good cheer.

One day, the old man saw a beautiful bird who danced through the air in front of him, and entranced him, and led him deep into the wood to a beautiful spring. The bird landed by the spring and the man understood that he was to drink of the spring.

He drank deeply and fell into a deep sleep so that when he awoke, the sun was low in the sky. But the man felt quite invigorated and was able to accomplish his entire day's work in the few hours he had left.

When he got home, and went into his wife, she said, "What happened to you? Look at your arms." He looked at his arms and the skin was smooth and taut. His wife said "You have become youth again; what happened?"

The next day, he led his wife to the spring, and she too drank long and deep and fell asleep and when she came home they celebrated that they had become young again.

As days passed, their neighbor, who was a greedy, greedy man, began to take an interest in their new youth and energy. He came over to inquire about what had happened. The old couple were happy to share their good news and took him to the spring.

Being the greedy man that he was, he drank and drank and drank from the spring and then he too fell into a deep sleep.

As dark approached, the old man and the old woman began to have concern for their neighbor as he had not yet returned home. When they went to the spring, they found a little baby lying on top of a pile of clothes which turned out to be those of the greedy neighbor.

They took the baby home and raised him as the son which they had never had before.

THE DIVINE WELL: Today's story is about a divine well. "Jacob's Well" is still there today near Nablus in the Palestinian territories and there is a monastery there. It is about 135 feet

deep and is at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, the site of the holy temple of the Samaritan people. They understood God to want a temple built in this place, on this mountain, and not in Jerusalem, so in Jesus' time its beauty and majesty rivalled that of the Temple we know about in Jerusalem.

The symbol of the well is very profound in the Chinese teaching of the I Ching, the ancient Taoist text. The well symbolizes that which is firm and unchanging. Just as a well never moves, so human need never changes. The water from a well is basic to life. The well is a symbol of the inexhaustible wellspring of the divine deep in the human soul. The well was central to village life in Jesus' time in ways that we no longer understand. It was the center of the village; the place where women came early in the morning, and late in the coolness of the afternoon to exchange news and weave the social fabric.

WOMAN: The woman in the story came at midday because no one else was there in the sun and heat of noon. She was an outcast. For us, this woman epitomizes all that society marginalizes; All that we marginalize and reject.

She is discriminated again because of her gender. In the United States and the developed world, we are blessed by the full inclusion of women and a significant decrease in misogynism, but in the developing world there is horrific prejudice and oppression directed against women simply because of their gender.

She is rejected because of her culture. It is considered ritually impure for a Jew to associate with a Samaritan. There is a rejection of her because of her culture of origin, and because of the religious hostility between Jews and Samaritan.

She is rejected because she is poor; because of her social class. She is poor because she is unmarried and divorced; not acceptable.

She is an outcast because of the moral stigma of not only one but multiple divorces, and because she is not living with someone who is not her husband. Thank goodness we no longer consider being gay a moral stigma; we have a new understanding of the differences between people.

JESUS: Jesus was taking a rest at his ancestor Jacob's well. He was no doubt weary because of all the conflict in Judea, and he was making his way home, across Samaria, to Galilee, a journey by foot of about 30 miles.

Through his brief encounter with this Samaritan woman he teaches us inclusion, not exclusion; dignity not denigration; empowerment not exploitation; and affirmation, not marginalization.

These are values that continue to challenge and confound us to this day. In God, all are included equally; all share power; all are honored and given dignity, all are affirmed and no human being is marginalized because of their gender, their class, their religion, their culture, their morality.

Jesus presents to the woman, and to us, the living water. The water of the spirit that quenches our deepest needs and desire. Like Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "No one is to die of a parched soul." Jesus provides the water.

FOOD Jesus disciples have gone to find food and when they come back, they are told that Jesus' food is to do the will of the Father, that the fields are ripe for harvest. He is telling them that the people long for a drink of the spirit; that spiritual food the Living Water which Jesus offers..

Just as the poor old man and woman drank deeply of the Magic Spring, we are exhorted to drink deeply of the Living Water of Jesus that we might be water-bearers to a thirsty world.