

Healing Well

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A Morning Offering

John O'Donohue

I bless the night that nourished my heart
To set the ghosts of longing free
Into the flow and figure of dream
That went to harvest from the dark
Bread for the hunger no one sees.

All that is eternal in me
Welcome the wonder of this day,
The field of brightness it creates
Offering time for each thing
To arise and illuminate.

I place on the altar of dawn:
The quiet loyalty of breath,
The tent of thought where I shelter,
Wave of desire I am shore to
And all beauty drawn to the eye.

May my mind come alive today
To the invisible geography
That invites me to new frontiers,
To break the dead shell of yesterdays,
To risk being disturbed and changed.

May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.

Scripture Reading: John 4:5-15

So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

In the reading from the Gospel of John a woman went to an ancient place looking for water and there she found more than water; she found the one that her people had been waiting for, seeking for centuries. She came to the well with her clay jar to carry water back to her family, and after speaking with Jesus she left her jar at the well because she had become herself a vessel of living water, with a message to share with her friends. That message is that the Divine Energy of the Universe is not restricted to one mountain, one temple, one people, one nation, one religion, one Moses, or even one Jesus. God, the vital spirit/energy of the universe is in everything, and everything is in the divine energy of the universe. That's just the truth. Look for it. Look up; there is a rock gushing somewhere in your life. That's just the truth; look for it ... patiently. Expecting the unexpected yet hoped for.

Where shall we look for it? Let's drop our bucket once more in the healing well story of the woman at the well. I want to share with you this scripture passage as it is presented in *The Message*, alongside reflections on this passage by a colleague of mine from Seminary, a Methodist minister named Stephen Garnaas-Holmes. Stephen's words are in italics.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

At the time of the great exile to Babylon the Samaritans, the people of the northern Kingdom, stayed behind, and they worshipped a different Holy Mountain than the people of the southern Kingdom. When the time of exile was over and the Judeans returned to their homeland there was great resentment against these Samaritans. “We were here first,” they said. This hatred between peoples lasted for centuries.

Jesus answered, “If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.” The woman said, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this ‘living water’? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?” Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst — not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.” The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!” He said, “Go call your husband and then come back.” “I have no husband,” she said. “That's nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband.”

Women did not have the power to marry or to divorce. That was the discretion of the man. So she has been used five times, and is being used now again. But Jesus neither judges her past nor dwells on her situation. He names her situation with insightful accuracy, but allows her to set the agenda for their conversation. She doesn't want to talk about the men in her life. She wants to talk about God. So they do. [And she says to Jesus,] “Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?” “Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship God neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. But the time is coming — it has, in fact, come — when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.”

This woman was guilty of being a woman, a Samaritan, a woman abandoned five times, and yet Jesus loved her unconditionally. For years she has been ignored, belittled, and treated as if she had no worthy ideas or valid perspective. She has been treated as if she is not worthy of another's attention or fidelity. She is ostracized by her community (she can't go to the well 'till noon, being at the bottom of the village pecking order for morning water). But now, at last, here is someone — a man, no less, and a Jewish rabbi! — who listens to her, who attends, not to what he thinks of her, but to what she is actually saying. He doesn't just tolerate her. He truly, deeply and wholly accepts her, and all of who she is. We all have our secret burdens of pain, shame or despair. We all have our secret struggles, our failures, our wandering journeys. We have been misunderstood, judged, labeled. We are all thirsting for acceptance, in which we can just be ourselves without

either pretending we're perfect or dwelling on our wounds. And we all want our place of worship to be a healing well, a safe place for people whose lives are broken, and in being broken open, want to be made whole again.

The woman said, “I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story.” And Jesus replies, “This is the whole story. **This conversation we are having is the whole story.** You don't have to wait any longer or look any further.”

This ability to embrace people is an embodiment of God's grace. God receives us without labels, without judgment, without borders without distraction, and attends to our hearts. What we are all most thirsty for is to belong and to be free.

That’s just the truth. Look for it; look up. There’s a well gushing with refreshment for you somewhere in your life. Your past only sounds good because you can’t see the future. There is a rock gushing somewhere in your life. That’s just the truth. Look for it. And when you find it, share it with others. And if you haven’t found it yet, ask for a clue. At the Healing Well.

That’s one of my dreams for the church. I would call it Healing Well United Church of Christ. A faith community — better said, a trust community, a church, with all of its faults, and humans being human, that is fallible and prone to egocentric behaviors. A place where we can learn how to forgive, learn how to have open and honest conversations, that have both chutzpah and humility. A place where we can incubate the gifts that we have to share, with the awareness that all along it is the grace of God that called us to be here now, to be the living vessels of living water, that draws deeply from the healing well. That’s just the truth; look for it. It’s everywhere and everywhen.

Let me close with this quote from Elizabeth Taylor, a woman who had many husbands, and who was a leader in the cause to treat people living with HIV/AIDS with respect and the unconditional love that they deserved.

I call upon you to draw from the depths of your being — to prove that we are a human race, to prove that our love outweighs our need to hate, that our compassion is more compelling than our need to blame.

— Elizabeth Taylor

Let the people say “Amen.”