

More than 3,000 years ago, an unknown seeker began digging a hole in the crusty soil where he and his family scratched out a living. Months later, at a depth of more than 100 feet, the man finally struck what he was after: "Water!"

The place would become known as "Jacob's well," and from its depths would rise the grace that sustained generation upon generation of Israelites. In time, however, this region of Canaan, known as Samaria, became shunned by traditional Jews. A great antagonism grew up between Jews and their cousins, the Samaritans.

Hence, Jews bypassed it, as it was where the sinners lived. What could be so important that Jesus would choose to go through Samaria where he, as a Jew, was not welcome? Because there were sinners there and had come to dig a well.

In the Middle East, women followed the same two basic rules when it came to drawing water: first, carrying a bag or jar full of water was a very heavy job, so women would go out only in the early morning or in the late afternoon when it wasn't blazing hot.

Second, they always went out in the company of others, because drawing water was a social affair. But here is this woman coming out at the peak of the heat and all by herself. Why would she be doing at the heat of the day?

Jesus digs into the conversation by making a simple request: "Will you give me a drink?" She responds, "Jews and Samaritans don't hang out together and they certainly don't drink together, remember? Men and women aren't even supposed to speak in public to one another; why are you talking to me?"

Jesus answered her, "What I'm asking for is simply a chance to give you what you are really looking for. I know you are thirsty—thirsty for something you won't find in this well."

This time the well digger hits limestone. "Look," the woman says, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep." Translation: "Do you really think you're going to meet my needs?" As Jesus digs deeper, the rock just seems to get harder, and the conditions darker. This woman's heart is very hard to find. She mocks him about Jacob's greatness.

Then, suddenly, Jesus finds a crack. He tells her that he can meet the deepest thirst in her and fill her up to overflowing with an eternal source of life.

And for a moment, she starts to open: "Sir, give me this water..." She longs to live life differently than she has been.

Jesus asks her to go call her husband...and the water begins to rise as her heart opens: "I have no husband." And then comes the final shovel: "You are right – you have gone through five and then one you are with is not your husband." She calls him a prophet and becomes his disciple.

It is hard to know the truth about people sometimes. +One recalls the crusty surface of Mr.

Barlow, a math teacher in his high school who they all made fun of for his abrasive ways and flights of extreme anger. “We never thought about what might lie beneath the surface of the man, the darkness and pain that might be there at the bottom of his heart shaft. The truth was that Mr. Barlow had once been a wonderfully affable man. And then he got the phone call that his wife and all his children had been killed in a terrible car accident.”

The experience began a process in which layer after layer of anger formed over his heart like 100 feet of limestone.

Now we know why the Samaritan woman couldn't come to the well in the cool of the day and the company of other women. It was because no woman in town would have anything to do with her. We have our own colorful words for such a woman.

What the passage doesn't tell us is how she became this way. Maybe her problem was her own sin. But maybe it was also because she'd suffered some brutal abuse growing up in her, losing all esteem and hope. Drifting after one man for another, finding more abuse, more self-hatred and thus ruin the thing about us that is most important—the heart God created to beat after his.

Perhaps she'd seen so much loss and rejection in life that she believed it'd never change and that there was no way out. But Jesus is the Way, the Truth and Life.

What I do know is that some of the hard, crusty people we meet every day are hiding secrets they don't speak of often or haven't even faced in themselves.

They've developed a way of getting by in the world that seems ugly, awkward, or too impressive, but this is merely the protective, pile-up of spiritual limestone—the layer of anger, fear, or anxiety—over a place in their hearts that got injured or became distorted.

How's your heart in this regard? Are you thirsty? Do you ever ache for something that will rise up to cleanse and heal, to fill and refresh that part of you that is dry and broken? If so, then I have a message for you today: The Seeker has come to meet you today.

He has come to put his spade into the soil of your life. He has come to dig down deep into the ground of your being, to work his way down to the very bottom of the shaft and place his pick into the cracks of your heart.

He comes to help you find what is broken, to replace the lies with his truth, to bring up in that place the living water of his Holy Spirit, the wellspring of his life-giving heart.

Like the woman at the well did, we've got to stay with Jesus long enough for him to help us find that deep place and bring his new life up through it. He bids us to come to the well to drink deeply of his grace, and find out what it is to truly live.