

## “If any man thirst”

Dennis M. Elliott

**W**E KNOW the story recorded in chapter 4 of John’s Gospel so well: the woman of Samaria did what she had done so many times as a matter of routine, she picked up her waterpot and went to Jacob’s Well so that her household might be able to enjoy the fresh spring water that seemed so inexhaustible. Of course, it also gave her the opportunity to talk and exchange local news with the other Samaritans who happened to be replenishing their water supplies at the same time.

On this particular occasion there was something different about Jacob’s Well, for a man, who was obviously Jewish, sat on the edge. He looked tired and thirsty, and asked her for a drink.

The woman saw a certain irony in the situation, not so much in the fact that she, a Samaritan, was about to draw water from the Jewish-sounding Jacob’s Well, but because he, a Jew, asked for a drink from a person who was a Samaritan. We can sense the surprise in her voice as she replied: “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (v. 9).

The woman’s surprise was heightened when the Jewish man, who was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, said to her: “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (v. 10).

Jesus had given the woman something upon which to reflect, and yet she had missed the point that he had made so eloquently concerning the “living water”, for she somehow equated this “living water” with the water in the well. So she said rather questioningly: “Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?” (v. 11).

The story of this woman’s meeting with Jesus at Jacob’s Well is a fascinating one, but it is the story behind the story—the story of the unfilled waterpot—that captures the imagination. One might conceivably have expected the woman to have listened attentively to all that Jesus told her, then to have filled her waterpot and, after having taken it home, gone into the city to spread

abroad the joyous news of her meeting with the Messiah at the well.

What Christ had said to her, however, about the “living water” that he was able to give her, together with the realisation that he was indeed the expected Messiah, completely changed a routine that had become so much a part of her life, and the waterpot remained unfilled: “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (vv. 28,29).

Could it be that nothing would have induced her to lower it into the well for her supply of water until she had first hurried breathlessly into the city to announce the tidings that many were waiting to hear—the Messiah had come? It might also be suggested that she left her unfilled waterpot by the side of the well so that Jesus and his disciples could quench their thirst, for she had already noted that Jesus had “nothing to draw with” (v. 11).

This incident is one that has real meaning for the followers of Jesus from that day to this. The true believers have in all ages partaken of that “living water” offered by Christ, and thirsted no longer for the things of the world. We recall that it was in the temple on the last day of the feast that Jesus exclaimed: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (7:37). He was inviting all who heeded his teachings concerning the ways of God to drink freely of the “living water”, the water of life that he offered to those of humble and honest heart who sought to honour and obey God’s Word.

We, as a community of true believers in Christ, have, in the unfailing mercy and love of our heavenly Father, been brought unto the “living water”, that spiritual drink that flows from the Rock that is Christ (1 Cor. 10:4; cf. Ex. 17:6). Together with all those faithful ones who have gone before, we look forward with joyful anticipation to the day when the “living water” will change our lives eternally: “but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jno. 4:14).