



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: "The Stranger At The Well"  
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## Readings for this Sunday:

Old Testament	Exodus 17:1-7
Epistle	Romans 5:1-11
Gospel	John 4:5-26,39-42

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Today's story from the Gospel is long, but it is also a very interesting episode from our Lord's ministry. It tells us not only about something that happened to a certain woman in a certain border town, but it also tells us about something that happens to us when we deal with God.

There are details about the story of the woman by the well that don't mean much to us now, but that would have struck home to anyone hearing about what happened. Jewish listeners would have noted that the woman was of mixed race, coming from the area of the Samaritans where Jews and Greeks and God knows who else had been mixing for generations. Their version of Judaism was as strange to their neighbors as the Mormons would be to us. That Jesus even showed up in this area was pretty shocking: that he would use a member of this society as an example is even more bizarre.

Besides that, there is the fact that she is a woman: a point that has been the subject of many sermons over the years. But Jesus wasn't adverse to speaking to woman, and they were part of his following from almost the very beginning. Still, those of his era would have picked up on it, together with the point that she gives her moral

status away from her first appearance on the scene: she comes to get water at the hottest part of the day. No one in a Near Eastern village would do that unless he or she didn't want to meet up with anyone else at the well. She is obviously a notorious figure in her town, and we learn why when the story of her serial relationships is later revealed.

All of that makes this a very interesting study of culture, ethics and Jesus' willingness to challenge the conventions of his time. But it doesn't tell us something even more important for us today: that this story is also a parable of how most people meet God.

Let's look at the facts. Most of us, like the woman at the well, have some kind of religious belief or faith. For most of us it is a mish-mash of straight biblical teaching, the interpretation of our particular denomination, and bits and pieces of other practices, be they Chinese or South Asian or Filipino or New Age Western which affect even the most devout of Christians. But each of us also has an inner longing: to find meaning and connection- a hope against the cold, cruel world- the assurance that all that we are and all the we do can mean something.

Suddenly, though, and usually in the course of our everyday lives, God appears in our lives. It may be through a person or an event or a realization. It can be troubling or ironic, like it was for the woman in the story. It touches us deeply: for the woman it was the experience of having the details of her life assumed by a perfect stranger. And then, when He has our attention, God gives us the opportunity to change our lives forever. For the woman in the story, this is symbolized by her leaving her water jar and running to share her new discovery with her neighbors.

Here, too, then is the ideal of the Christian experience: a chance encounter with God through Christ, the discovery that God really does know and care about us, even the deep, dark secrets of our inmost selves. And then, after God accepts and forgives us, the overwhelming joy that finds its expression in telling others about what God in Christ has done in our lives. A story that seems to be about exotic people in foreign

lands long ago becomes a story about any of us who have felt the touch of God in our lives and then responded.

And those who haven't been touched? It is more likely that God has been trying to contact you many times but for various reasons there has been interference: from the busyness of our lives, from the baggage and guilt we carry with us, or from the cynicism that doubts God's interest in who we are and what is important to us. The answer: to be prepared for the time when you will be going to your own well or office water cooler or the shopping mall, perhaps worried about your own shame and guilt for a past that hasn't been perfect, and a Stranger there asks you for something—asks you to step out of yourself and your problems for a moment and encounter something wonderful, personal and new.

Be on the lookout for God in the most unlikely of places, and for a voice that will ask in a way that only you can respond to: "Give me a drink. Let's talk about you. Then put down your water jar and go to share the Good News."