

If you knew ...

John 4:1-30

February 4, 2007

If you knew that eating five to ten servings of fruits and vegetables each day reduces the risk of heart disease and cancer and stroke, would you eat more fruits and vegetables?

If you knew that regular vigorous exercise enables a longer life, would you exercise?

If you knew that wearing a seat belt and shoulder harness reduces the possibility of severe injury in case of an accident, would you buckle up?

If you knew that the earth is the Lord's, that its beauty and grandeur and astonishing variety reflect the unfathomable mind of its creator, would you want to take better care of it?

If you knew that the steady and potentially disastrous warming of the earth's climate is due largely to human activity, would you change your lifestyle?

If you knew that the taste of revenge is bitter and unsatisfying, and that violence only breeds more violence, and that only good can finally overcome evil, would you learn to love your enemies?

If you knew that your Muslim neighbor is a creature made in the image of God, like you, and that he longs for shalom for all creation, like you, would you listen to what he has to say about his faith and would you share with him what you have to say about yours?

If you knew that every human life is precious, and that God is the giver and guardian and redeemer of every human life, would you refuse to kill, ever?

If you knew that people are more important than things, would you buy less and give away more?

If you knew that life is short, that every moment of a lifetime is precious, would you spend more time with those you love and less time with ... whatever else?

If you knew that the Bible is the word of God, that it is a source of wisdom and insight and encouragement, that hearing and knowing and living its story would change your life forever, would you read it?

If you knew that someone in this church needs you, needs you to be here, to encourage him, to strengthen his faith and to let him know that he is loved, would you faithfully come to church, not just for your own sake, but for his?

If you knew that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, would you ask him to lead the way?

If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water ...

Jesus was on his way to Galilee from Judea. Along the way he had to pass through Samaria. It was noon and Jesus was tired. And probably hot, probably thirsty, probably hungry. His traveling companions went into town to buy food, and Jesus sat down by a well to await their return.

While Jesus was seated by the well, a woman approached to draw water from the well, a Samaritan woman. Jesus did not seek her out. She did not seek Jesus out. This was simply one of the many incidental encounters all of us have during our daily routines. But every encounter, every contact with another human being, is an opportunity, an opportunity to show forth the kindness and goodness of God by what we say and by what we do. There are no throwaway moments. Every moment counts for the sake of the God's kingdom, for the sake of those God loves.

So Jesus encounters this Samaritan woman along the way and he asks her for a drink of water. Why do you suppose Jesus asks her for a drink? Because he is thirsty!

But she hesitates: *You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan -- so how can you ask me for a drink?* You see, as the gospel narrator observes, *Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.* Actually, that's a rather gentle translation. As the note in your Good News Bible suggests, the comment could also be translated: *Jews will have nothing to do with Samaritans!*

If she only knew. If she only knew, but she doesn't, at least not yet! All she knows, all she sees, is that he is a Jew. There they are, two human beings in need of refreshment, each having the power and the means to refresh the other, but she is trapped, trapped and blinded by the expectations and limitations her culture, his culture, her understanding, her experience, have embedded into her psyche.

She is preoccupied by their differences. She acknowledges the Jewish disdain of her race without protest, and she is acutely aware of their religious differences: *My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews (you Jews!) say that Jerusalem is the place we should worship God.*

You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan ... To her, that says it all. Their differences set an inviolable limit to the possible outcomes of this encounter.

You are a Muslim and I am a Christian. You are a Republican and I am a Democrat. You are black and I am white. You are gay and I am straight.

You are my enemy. You are my rival. You are a stranger. You are an undocumented alien. You are a liberal. You are a conservative. You are an evangelical.

You are a woman and I am a man. You are old and I am young. You are poor and I am not poor.

Does that say it all? Do our preconceived notions, our prejudices, our fears, set hard and fast limits to the possibilities of our human encounters?

If you only knew ...

Jesus is wonderfully free of prejudice and fear and cultural blindness, because he knows. She may not know him, but he knows her and he knows God. From his point of view, the possibilities of this encounter are limitless. She hesitates to draw him a drink of water, but he is ready to offer her a priceless gift.

He knows she is thirsty. He knows she is restless. She is restless, just like Nicodemus was restless, restless for something more, longing for meaning, longing for intimacy, longing for love, longing for understanding, longing for affirmation. Why do you think she has run through at least six different men? She is thirsty! Thirsty for life-giving water, thirsty for life! And that is what Jesus offers her.

She is preoccupied by their ethnic differences, but Jesus meets her, talks with her, asks her for a drink. He doesn't see a woman, a Samaritan. He sees a human being thirsty for God. He doesn't make anything of the religious differences between Samaritans and Jews, but points to new day, a new way for worship, available to all, a way for all people to come into God's presence in true worship without any restrictions of place or race or tradition or style.

And though Jesus does point out her dubious history with men, he does not judge her for it. He simply shines a light, allowing her to see, allowing her to see that she is seen, that she is known, allowing her the possibility to taste something new, to be something new. He knows she is thirsty, and he offers her the drink that will satisfy her for a lifetime.

Are you thirsty? For life-giving water? For life? For joy? For peace? For fulfillment? For God? What do you suppose Jesus might offer you?

The Samaritan woman came to Jacob's well looking for water, but when she returned to town, she left her water jar behind! She came looking for water, but found something far more satisfying!

There were other things she left behind, too. She thinks of Jesus no longer as that Jew, but wonders aloud to her fellow Samaritans if he could be the Messiah, her Messiah, their Messiah. And he is. He is the Messiah -- their Messiah, her Messiah -- the one who can and who has set her free from the chains of prejudice and debasement, discrimination and judgment, guilt and shame. *He told me everything I have ever done.* He knows me. He acknowledges me. He gives me dignity.

If you knew, if you only knew what God gives and who it is that offers it to you ...

If you knew that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God ...

If you knew that Jesus offers you a priceless gift, the gift of life itself in all its fullness ...

Would you go to him? Would you welcome him when he comes to you? Would you love him above everything else in your life and would you put following him before every other priority in your life? Would you accept his gift of life-giving water and allow that gift to change the way you see ... everything and everyone?