

Life Changing Experience – John 4: 5-42

Life changing experience is changing a person's life or circumstances in a substantial way — something that moves them, shakes them up, and changes their perspective.

Many people who have life changing experience recalled that it started with simple, normal and ordinary events, for example: conversation over coffee or tea with friends or strangers.

Our Gospel reading this morning also reminds us the simple conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus near the Jacob's well... let us look at more closely the reading.

In many part of the world – particularly in most of third world countries, wells are incredibly important sources of fresh and vital water. When wells ran dry people died. Wells are places where life becomes possible for people and their livestock.

This particular well – Jacob's well also known as Jacob's fountain and Well of Sychar is a deep well from a solid rock. It is situated a short distance from the archaeological site of Tell Balata, which is to be the site of Shechem.

The well currently lies within the complex of an Eastern Orthodox monastery of the same name, in the city of Nablus in the West Bank.

Jewish, Samaritan, Christian, and Muslim traditions all associate the well with Jacob. The well is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, but Genesis 33:18-20 states that when Jacob returned to Shechem from Paddan Aram, he camped "before" the city and bought the land on which he pitched his tent. Biblical scholars contend that the plot of land is the same one upon which Jacob's Well was constructed.

The well was not only a source of water, but at one time was touched by the man and family which gave life to a mighty, and holy nation. This well was a source not only of drink, but it fed the roots of an amazing family tree: Israel.

This time according to John's Gospel, a woman comes to get water. She at least knows where to find it. Her family has been coming here since before Moses.

She meets a man who has also found the water but cannot get to it - no bucket! He surprises her by asking for a drink. That was the first surprise. Hits her between the eyes really because he was, after all, male, a Jewish male. She was a woman, a Samaritan woman.

Jesus began the conversation by breaking multiple cultural conventions when he asked her for a drink. We, like she, come with all sorts of personal and cultural baggage in our own lives, some of which could prevent us from seeing and experiencing the saving power of God in Jesus Christ. We hear this woman continually bringing out that baggage and see Jesus continually helping her place it aside. In a society where men did not talk to women in public, from a culture that did not deal at all with this woman's culture and tradition, Jesus treats her as a real person. Boundaries are being bridged here, customs and traditions broken – and the new relationship forms.

Jesus asks the woman and the woman gives a generous hospitality. And things happen. Jesus gives her sight to see what she really was - not the negative stuff, but to see her own worth and to know that she had something to contribute. The blindness caused by inferiority and arrogance between the two races was wiped away.

When the Samaritan woman was made whole and sight was given to her, she began to see herself clearly. Loving strangers and offering hospitality to others who are different is the heart of God's mission. This has transformed differences into mission. This life changing experience encourages her to put God in her heart and to do what God wants every disciple to do it: missional task.

The woman leaves her bucket at the well and carries the "living water" with her. When she is open to the radical possibility that God in Jesus values her as herself, then she makes the greatest discovery of all. She herself is God's gift to others who struggle to know and to understand God.

Like Mary's who are before and after her in this gospel, she herself is life giving, John describes this as being a bearer of 'living water'. She is herself a living sign of the very One who is light for the world, the giver of an easy yoke, the way of truth and of life.

Here is a man who knows her past, who speaks to her of 'living water', that is the very source of life. Who is this? "This can't be the long awaited Messiah, can he?" she asks.

This Messiah comes in a form other than what is expected. The Saviour comes to us to save, rather than our coming to him. It is all causing her to unsettle. It can be just as disconcerting for us. We all have our categories, our expectations about what can and cannot be, and Jesus breaks through those, disrupts expectations and expands possibilities. I love to use the term of 'expanding our grace margin'. Life changing experience expands our grace margin.

At the end of this story, the woman's testimony / her life changing experience brings all those in the town to believe in Him.

This is one of those Gospel texts which demonstrate the colossal nature of the New Beginning that Jesus brings. The Message and Life that Jesus brings rests on the faith that began with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob.

And, at the same time, it gives the new beginning for the possibility of life changing experience to each of us.

Jesus brings this new possibility to the Samaritan woman so clearly on the outside of Jesus' Jewish religion and culture... means that it's open to us all. If Jesus can bring his Life and Eternal water to a Samaritan woman he of course can bring the living water to us here in Australia in the 21 Century.

It is our mission to break down barriers of culture, language, race and religion and to worship God.