

What is "Ahh!"? It's not really a word. It's sort of an instinctive groan frequently uttered after we've taken a sip, or a gulp, of a refreshing beverage. You're dying of thirst, and you grab a bottle of water, twist off the cap and take a swig. You swallow, and then you say, "Ahh." Or, "Aaaaaahhhhh," depending on how badly dehydrated you are.

Several years ago, you may recall that the Coca-Cola Bottling Company came up with an advertising campaign designed to offer brand recognition across a number of the products they produced. It was called the *Ahh Effect* and it focused on Coke and the response drinkers would most likely have when taking a sip: an audible 'ahh.' The makers of the soda (we know so well) saw their publicity promotion as one that would continue for years to come. And as we think about the ahhh sound they were trying to cash in on, it may make us think about how that effect might play well in our Gospel from John this morning, which tells the story of Jesus talking to a woman at a well.

It isn't that hard to imagine that the son of God knew all about water. Growing up in the rocky, dry land of Israel, he knew first-hand that water was a precious resource that didn't come easily. He must have grown up seeing his mother and countless other women spend hours of their days hauling water for cooking, cleaning, and drinking. So....when Jesus encounters the lone Samaritan woman at the well in the hot noonday sun, he could appreciate the hard work that was required to draw enough water from that deep well in order to meet the needs of her family.

Did you know that H<sub>2</sub>O is notoriously heavy? 1 pint of it weighs 1 pound, so a 5-gallon bucket equals a staggering 40 pounds. A woman would have to haul that much water several times every day to meet the demands of a large family and busy household. So when Jesus, a very human Savior, encounters the woman at the well, he's hot, tired from his journey, and, what's more, he's not packing a bottle of Evian. So he's parched. But he knows exactly what he needs to ease his thirst; "Give me a drink," he says to the Samaritan woman. It's a touching, vulnerable moment, one of the very few times that we hear Jesus make a request of another person. He needs something that she can provide.

In that moment it doesn't matter that he's the Son of God, the Savior of the world, a man in a male-oriented society, or a Jew encountering someone from the ethnically disparaged Samaritan race. All the barriers and differences -- like gender and nationality -- the things that might divide them, fall away; Jesus is simply a person with a basic human need, and this woman has the ability to help him. She can give him water. So, similar to our reaction when we take a sip to rehydrate we can safely assume that Jesus had his "ahh" moment, too. Water for us humans is necessary for our physical survival!

What we don't often consider, however, is how much we need the living water of Jesus offered to us through the Holy Spirit for our spiritual survival. The woman at the well can help us to understand this when we witness her have her own ahh moment. And rather than her having an involuntary response to a physical rehydration, she has a very conscious and voluntary reaction with regards to her faith. Similarly, when we take a sip of the water that Jesus offers us, wow, not only is it refreshing, but its supply is never-ending!

Before we continue to explore the Samaritan women's experience let's back up a bit for a moment. I think it is important for us to consider the fact that the story never actually

tells us if Jesus gets that cup of water, because there's something much more important going on. We don't know if this unnamed woman took the time to draw water for the Jewish rabbi to satisfy his request. We do know, however, that she stops what she is doing, because she's amazed and in awe that Jesus is actually speaking to her! Just by noticing her, Jesus has opened up a world of brand new possibilities to this woman who was weighed down by guilt and shame.

As we witness in the Gospel stories about him, our Lord, is never simply a "taker"; he hasn't come into her life simply to demand something that he needs. Jesus is experiencing the discomfort of thirst, but he knows that the woman at the well is carrying a far heavier burden. He's prepared to give her much more than a simple cup of cold water to drink. He's going to offer her something that Coke, Pepsi, Nestle, Fiji, and Arrowhead cannot offer: water that will remove her thirst forever.

Jesus knows exactly who this woman is, and can see the painful secrets of her heart. He recognizes her thirst for forgiveness and acceptance. He *offers* what she needs even before she knows enough to ask for it. And unlike Jesus in our story, she doesn't even have to voice her request -- "I can give you living water," he says, water that can heal your spirit and ease the pain in your heart, water that is truly revitalizing and utterly invigorating.

The Samaritan woman is so consumed with the day-in, day-out burden of hauling endless buckets of water that she can't even grasp the magnitude of what Jesus is offering her. She's simply eager to find a way to avoid the back-breaking drudgery that currently defines her life. When Jesus tells her that he has water that will forever cure her thirst, she eagerly replies, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty, or have to come here to draw water ever again!"

We know of course that our Lord and Savior is offering to open up all of eternity for this woman, and yet her initial reaction is completely centered around the possibility of making fewer trips to the village well. And yet, I'm fairly certain that we can probably relate to her initial response. How often are we ready to settle for less than what God wants to offer to us? How often do we hesitate to ask for anything from our generous God who's prepared to let love, and blessing, and forgiveness flow over us like a never ending stream?

Of course, as Disciples of Christ we understand that there is really no way for the Samaritan woman to visualize how refreshing the kind of water she is being offered truly is, until she figures out who she is actually with! Jesus isn't suggesting a better way for her to do her chores. He's isn't proposing to create a better work environment for her. He's offering to ease the burden of her troubled soul and release her from the pain of her guilt.

The woman standing before him is living with a past that makes her an outcast in her own village -- she's been married multiple times. Even worse, for that day and age and culture -- she's now living with a man who's not even her husband. She carries with her the pain of guilt, shame, and rejection -- and that's a far heavier burden than the water that she hauls every day. Jesus doesn't want to help her with the burden of her hands; he wants to ease the burden of her heart. He wants to remove the pain of isolation and disgrace. There by the well Jesus shows this woman why he has come -- he wants to offer the gift of God's life-giving Spirit, water that wells "up to eternal life" in God's people.

Just as the Samaritan woman has exactly what Jesus needs in that moment -- water -- he has precisely what she needs as well, even if she doesn't know it yet: grace and forgiveness and the promise of new life. Now that is Refreshing! Not a bad trade for a cup of water! And although we are never given the opportunity to discover if Jesus is able to have his hydration needs met, we do get to see the power of his *transforming* love when it's given and received.

Jesus tells her that he is the Messiah, the One that they have all been waiting and hoping for. We hear him tell her the good news, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him." That's what Jesus offers this tired, burdened woman -- a chance to be transformed. She can be washed clean with but one drink of the water he's offering her.

It's possible that the woman Jesus encountered that day had been an outcast in her own village because of her misdeeds and guilty past. But all of that is behind her now. She takes the "living water" that Jesus has given her and she runs back to her village to tell others the good news. She eagerly approaches everyone that she sees and says with wonder, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" Just one sip of the spiritual water Jesus offered her transforms her life. She becomes so excited, and reinvigorated from it; she can't keep such good news, such an awe inspiring encounter, to herself.

This begs the question, for what do we thirst? Someone who knows us as completely as Jesus does and yet loves us anyway? Forgiveness and new life that God alone can offer? A clean plate, a fresh start? Understanding? Rest? Renewal? Peace? To acknowledge the mistakes that we have made and know that there is still hope for us? To cast away the burden of guilt and the weight of regret?

Read the label found in our scripture passage today: All of that and more is offered to us in the "living water" Jesus offers us. "Living Water." Sort of sounds like a corporate brand, right? "Living Water" reaches a need far deeper than our everyday thirst. "Living Water" touches the part of us that wakes up in the night worried, or lonely, or consumed with remorse. "Living Water" can wash away the parts of us that feel unclean and threaten to keep us isolated forever. Take a sip of that water, and then say, "Ahh!" and Amen. Thanks be to God!