

Sermon for Sunday, July 23, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"CRACKPOTS AND FORGOTTEN JUGS"

Text: "So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'" St. John 4:28,29

The woman at the well was a crackpot. There are a lot of reasons to think this. For one thing, she came to the water well at noon. Nobody in his right mind did that. The women, whose job it was to bring the water, came to the well either in the early morning when it was still cool, or late in the afternoon when the hot Judean sun was in the west and the cooling breezes of evening had begun to blow. But nobody came when the sun stood directly overhead, when it burned with fierce intensity, with not a breath of air stirring.

Have you ever wondered why she came at noon? Maybe she was so disorganized that she ran out of water in the middle of the day. Or maybe she was so preoccupied that morning she just forgot to go. Or perhaps, and most likely of all, the other women would have nothing to do with her and so she deliberately planned her trips to the water well when no one else would be there. After all, she had been married five times and the other women would be hostile and suspicious of her. Surely they would not include her in their little circles of intimate woman talk. Nobody would walk back to town with her. And who of us likes to be cut dead--ignored--treated like so much scum? So probably she came at noon to avoid all of the insults and the hurt.

Are there things in your life that cause people to steer clear of you? Maybe we talk too much about ourselves--or our problems--or maybe we are critical and judgmental. Maybe we are not much fun to be around. And when you stop to think about it, the woman at the well who had five husbands must have had some serious emotional problems. Why so many husbands? What kind of needs did she have that ran from man to man? What kind of inner turmoil stirred up her emotions so that she couldn't live with anyone very long? On top of it all, she was a religious nut as well. The first stranger that comes along is a target for religious argument about God and the Messiah and whether Jerusalem or her own mountain was the right place to worship.

You know, it is an interesting thing, but the people who argue most about God--who raise all sorts of rational arguments against God or against Jesus are frequently people who have something wrong in their lives. Frequently, there is some sin, some bad thing, and to admit the reality of God or Jesus would mean changing one's life. So sometimes people marshal all sorts of arguments for not believing in God. That, in reality, was what the woman at the well did. She wanted to argue religion with Jesus.

So the woman at the well was a crackpot. Everybody knew it. And maybe she knew it herself. Nobody would associate with her any more. All alone she came to the well at noon. But isn't it interesting how Jesus so often comes to meet us at the points of our need and the places of our failures? So often it is when we are lonely when we have failed, when nobody else seems to care that Jesus comes to touch our lives. So it was with the woman at the well.

Are you a crackpot this morning? Most of us are in one way or another. Sometimes we think we are the only non-crackpot in the world. We are like the Quaker who said to his friends, "Everyone in the world is odd but thee and me and sometimes I am not so sure about thee." But the truth is, most of us have inner needs, inner turmoil, that makes us act and do and say things we seem to have no control over. Too often

our needs possess us and control us and we end up doing things we are ashamed and sorry for.

Is that true in your life? I know it is in mine. Sometimes my own problems are so intense that I become insensitive to the kinds of needs and problems others have. Do you do that? We get so introverted in terms of our own emotions, so turned in on self, that we lose our ability to be sensitive to the needs and hurts and problems of others.

Do you know what changed the woman at the well? It was Jesus. When Jesus came into her life she got so excited she ran off to tell others about him and in the process forgot her water jug. Now, an interesting thing happened. The Bible says, "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony..." After all, there was nothing very believable about her or her life. Are we not forced to the conclusion that something radical, something transforming, happened to her?

Have you ever known anyone whose life and character were such that only a miracle could change them? I think it must have been like that with the woman at the well. She was so bad--so detestible--so repulsive that only a miracle could change her. But Jesus is in the miracle business. And when he changed the woman at the well, it was so radical, so dramatic, that it was immediately apparent to everyone. The Bible says, "They went out of the city and were coming to him." Yes, it was obvious that something dramatic and exciting had happened to her and they wanted to see for themselves.

Let me ask you a question. Have you let Jesus change your life? Have you let him deal with your heart, your attitudes, your needs in such a way that it is obvious to others that something dramatic has happened to you? Have you gotten so excited about the way Jesus has changed your crackpot life that you run off to share with others and forget your water jug? What happened to the woman at the well must have been terribly exciting--she just forgot everything else! Are you that excited about what Jesus has done or is doing in your life?

You know, it is when we get our lives changed--when we are obviously different, that others begin to desire Jesus for themselves. That's the second thing I want to mention this morning. First, the woman at the well got herself changed by Jesus. And the second, when that happened, others began to desire to have what she had. Isn't it a fact that few people are argued into the kingdom by rational statements, or intellectual reasons? No, most people are "lived" into the kingdom by the life of some transformed person. How about your life? Is there anything about it that would make other people want what you have?

Then the third thing I would call to our attention is this: having seen a transformed life, and having begun to desire it for themselves, the Bible tells us that they asked Jesus to stay with them. He stayed with them for two days and then the Bible says this: "They said to the woman, 'it is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'"

Oh, I don't know how to tell you how that touches my heart! For a person to know for himself! There are a lot of people today who believe in God, who believe in the Bible, who say they believe in Jesus. But it is another thing to have Jesus so touch your life that you know for yourself.

Do you know what my heart's desire is this morning? It is for every person here this morning to know for himself! Oh! To know for yourself! To have Jesus take your crackpot life and change it! That is the most exciting thing in the world.

You may be like the woman at the well. There may be things in your life that are bad and wicked and evil. You may be feeling lonely and cut off and isolated. But Jesus is in the miracle business. He can change your life. He can take the cracked pots of our lives and heal the flaws, mend the cracks, and make us whole again. He can so change our lives that others can see that God has done something for us.

I am sure there are some of you here this morning who have loved ones close to you that you wish Jesus would touch that person's life. Do you know the best way for that to happen? It is for your own life to be so changed, so transformed by Jesus, that they will want for themselves what you have.

Are you living a cracked pot life? Most of us are. Only the master potter can reshape your life; only the master potter can take the shattered vessel of who and what you are and transform it. In a moment we will sing our closing hymn. The first verse goes something like this, "Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still." Yes, Jesus is the potter, and our lives are the clay. We are clay vessels that are cracked and broken and only the master potter can make us whole again.

The woman at the well was a crackpot until Jesus touched her life. Then she knew for herself. Others saw the change in her life and desired what she had. When they met Jesus, then they knew for themselves.

Do you know for yourself this morning?