

At a Well or Love is in the Air

Romance.....

In the Bible when a man and a woman and a well all come together,

we know it's a romance, that love is in the air.

It was at a well that Abraham's servant met Rebecca and asked her for a drink of water.

When she offered to give not only him, but also his camels, water,

the servant knew he had found the girl for Isaac.

It was at a well that Moses met Zipporah,

the daughter of the priest of Midian,

the girl whom he would marry.

And it was at a well that Jacob met the love of his life,

Rachel, the beautiful one,

the girl for whom he labored and waited and whom he finally married.

It was at a well.

So, when we hear a story that begins with a tired man sitting down to rest by a well,

we know that love is in the air.

Love can mean marriage like it did for Jacob.

Love often does mean marriage

but in this story, the love in the air is more than that.

This is a romance, not a romance like a Harlequin paperback novel,

but the true love story.

It is the love story that is the meeting of minds and souls.

The man in our story is Jesus.

He and his companions are headed back to Galilee from Judea and they have decided to take the shortest route. This takes them through Samaria.

We know that Jews and Samaritans didn't get along. The Jews were contemptuous of Samaritans, regarding their way of worship and their place of worship as wrong, and their history of remaining behind while the "good people" were carted off to Babylon was seen as a sign of their apostasy. They are not right enough or good enough. The Samaritans were judged and found lacking. And the Samaritans probably judged the Jews equally harshly and found them equally lacking.

But the way through Samaria was the quickest way.

Even taking the short cut, Jesus is tired.

It has been a long walk and he wants to rest, relax, put up his feet, have lunch, and a drink of water.

He sits down and waits.

Along she comes. It is noon. The sun is high overhead and it is hot. It's not the time women usually come to get water, but it is the time she comes. She comes alone.

And he asks her for a drink.

Does she give him one? Does she act like Rebecca or Rachel and draw him a drink from the well?

Does she hand him the bucket like Zipporah did Moses?

No, she immediately turns his question back on him --

"Why are you, a man, a Jewish man, asking me, an unaccompanied woman, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

She wonders, "Who does he think he is?"

And she also wonders, "Who does he think I am?"

And he, does he get angry at her question, at her seeming refusal to comply with his request? Does he order her to serve him?

No, he engages her in conversation.

What a conversation it is!
For a while they are talking past each other.

They begin talking about two different kinds of water.

She is talking about well water and buckets and he is talking about some other water, some eternally thirst quenching water, some eternal life water, some bucketless water.

She hears him and she knows that he has something she wants, even if she doesn't understand what it is. He has something she wants more than she ever wanted anything in her life.

She has fallen in love.

Then he says, very quietly, having given her much to think about, "Go, get your husband."

And she replies, "Sir, I have no husband." The truth! She tells him the truth!

Multi-married woman – is she five times a widow or five times divorced? Or something of both?

Whatever, she has outlasted five men and now lives with a man to whom she is not married.

Now we know why she has come to the well at noon, in the heat of the day, alone, instead of with the other women, in the cool of the morning.

Is it her experience with men that has made her daring, given her the words to engage him in conversation? If it is, it doesn't matter.

What matters is that he is the seventh man in her life – five husbands, one man to live with – six men before him –

and he – the seventh, is the perfect one – he knows it and she knows it.

Suddenly, they aren't talking about water any more, but they're talking about the differences between them,

those pesky differences in ways of worship,

those rituals that can get in the way of human interaction, that can get in the way of relationships.

He says, "None of these things really matter. God doesn't care if you worship here in Samaria or down in Judea at the Temple in Jerusalem, or anywhere. He doesn't care what ritual you use or if you pray standing or kneeling. He doesn't care what prayer book you use or what hymns you sing. He doesn't care if you address him as "thee" or "you".

“God only wants worship in ‘spirit and in truth.’ God wants worship that comes from the whole person, from their ‘very selves, in adoration.’”

What about him? Has he fallen in love also?

Yes!

He loves her. He has accepted her. He doesn't stop talking with her when she doesn't understand about water. He isn't ashamed to converse with her when she admits her shady way of living and he doesn't shame her.

He accepts her just as she is.

She in turn says that everything he has told her will be true but only when the Messiah comes.

And because he loves, he now trusts her with his identity. He tells her that he is the one, the one for whom Jew and Samaritan have been waiting.

She, like all everyone in love, everyone who knows they are loved, can't wait to tell everyone – friends and neighbors – the “Good News”.

Love makes her a disciple.

What is love but sharing our innermost selves?

What is love but accepting our beloved just as they are,
not demanding change, or saying,

"If only you would do this" or
"If only you would have done that."

but seeing them in their unique specialness?

What is love but trust and honesty?

Years ago I heard a preacher say, "Lent is for Lovers."

It's true. Lent is for Lovers, and Christmas is for Lovers, and Epiphany is for Lovers, and Easter is for Lovers, and Pentecost is for Lovers. Every season, all year – every year – every day – every hour is for lovers because Jesus is the Lover.

We sing that Jesus is the "lover of my soul" and he is. He is the lover of my soul and your soul and the soul of the Samaritan woman, and he is the lover not just our souls but our very selves.

We speak of our selves, our souls, our bodies, but do we really believe that all of us, every particle of us, every bit of us, is loved.

They are We are..... Loved.

In all our faults, in all our failings, despite our wars,
our injustices to one another,
our impatience, our greediness, our envy, our anger –
we are loved.

At Christmas, we sing, "Who could not love him, loving us
so dearly." I think this unnamed woman, with her bucket, at a
well, sang it too.

It may be Lent, but today and every day, for her, for us,
love is in the air.

Can you feel it?

Amen.