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Since I'm the main dish washer in our home, I always request that family members rinse their plates before placing them on the counter, for sometimes I may not get around to washing them until the next morning, especially on evenings when I have a meeting at church. It always seems to happen that someone forgets, and so the next morning I find food dried onto the plates, making my job more difficult. But I'm always amazed that when I place the plate in the water and let it soak for a few minutes, eventually even the most stubborn dried-on food begins to dissolve and comes off the plate.

That's because water is known as the "universal solvent" since it's able to dissolve more substances than any other liquid. As water flows through the earth or our bodies, it carries valuable minerals and nutrients, which our bodies need. Water can dissolve things so easily due to its elements, for most of us learned that water is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen, H₂O. The hydrogen has a positive electrical charge, and the oxygen has a negative charge, which means it can

become attracted to many other molecules and disrupt the forces that hold other things together, hence allowing water to dissolve many items.¹

I don't know how much Jesus understood the chemical composition of water, but when he encountered people facing difficulties, he seemed to understand that water could dissolve a lifetime of struggles and allow healing to flow into one's life. The Gospel of John tells about one such encounter as Jesus met a woman at a well. His disciples had gone to town to get food, and when a woman from Samaria came to get water from a well in the ground, Jesus asked her for assistance in getting a drink.

She was quite shocked and replied, "I am a Samaritan woman. Jews and Samaritans don't get along, so why would you ask *me* for a drink?" Countless generations of bitterness existed between these two groups of people, and Jesus began to dissolve the friction that existed between himself and this unnamed woman.

Jesus replied that he offered the water that gives life, but she exclaimed, "You don't even have

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a bucket. How are you going to get life-giving water from the well?”

Jesus explained, “Everyone who drinks of well water will thirst again, but those who drink *my* water will never thirst again, for it’s a flowing fountain that gives eternal life.”

This sounded like a great deal to the woman, for she thought his source of water meant she would never have to make a trip to the well again. Getting a drink of water may not seem like much to us today, for all we have to do is turn on a faucet and we have water, but imagine if you had to walk several miles each day to fill up your bucket and then walk home without spilling it. Also imagine that the water you found was possibly contaminated. What if you knew that 388 people die from a waterborne illness every day, that a child dies every 21 seconds. Unfortunately, those statistics about water are a reality for some parts of our world today.

When a group of people from a Disciples of Christ church in Oklahoma learned about water problems in the Congo, they created

Dissolved by Living Water
February 4, 2018

Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

Disciples4Water and worked with Global Ministries to get pumps, dig wells, and train local people how to supply clean water to their villages.² They knew the importance of life-giving water, and now water flows through 33 communities that had no wells before.

Water is life-giving, for without water we would not survive more than a week, for our bodies are composed of 60% water. “Water acts as a lubricant for our joints, regulates our body temperature through sweating and respiration, and helps to flush waste.”³ Imagine being stranded without water.

A man [who] crashed his plane in the desert [knew the he needed water to survive]. Stranded without water, the unfortunate man trudged through the desert for hours until he could no longer stay on his feet. Then, as he began crawling across the burning sands, he encountered a necktie salesman. “Can I interest you in a nice new tie?” the salesman asked.

“Are you crazy?” the man gasped. “I’m dying of thirst and you want to sell me a necktie?” The

John 4:4-15

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salesman shrugged his shoulders and moved on, and the dying man resumed his crawling.

Finally, he came upon an unbelievable sight. There, before his eyes, in the middle of the desert, was a magnificent restaurant with neon lights blazing and a parking lot filled with cars. The desperate man crawled to the front door. With his voice growing weaker and weaker, he said to the doorman, “Please, help me in, I must have something to drink.”

To which the doorman replied, “Sorry sir, gentlemen are not admitted without a necktie.”⁴

As important as water is for basic survival, Jesus indicated the water he supplied was even more important. His water could dissolve the struggles of life, the pains and frustrations and disappointments that each of us face.

Jesus suggested that the woman at the well go and get her husband, but when she replied she didn’t have a husband, Jesus replied, “I know. You’ve had five husbands and the man you’re living with now isn’t your husband.” This wasn’t a moralistic statement condemning her for her

lifestyle, for we have no indication of what happened in each of her marriages—whether her husbands died from illness, were killed in war, left her, abused her, or anything else. Jesus makes no value judgement, but instead he continues in conversation with her—the longest extended conversation with anyone in the New Testament!⁵ Jesus and the woman have a deep theological conversation about worship, God as Spirit, and the Messiah.

When Jesus’ disciples show up in the middle of this conversation, they wonder why in the world he’s talking with a woman, which would not have been proper in those days. Unmarried women and men did not speak privately with one another, for that was considered crossing boundaries of appropriate behavior. You just didn’t do that!

The living water that Jesus offered, however, dissolved all sorts of conventional boundaries. In his conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus dissolved the ethnic and religious friction between generations of Jews and Samaritans. He dissolved the sexist barriers between men and women by

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treating her as an equal theological conversation partner. He dissolved moralistic judgments by offering acceptance and hope.

In response, the woman dropped her water jar and ran into the city, telling everyone that she found someone who knew her inner life and all the pains and struggles she's endured—and yet, he still accepted and welcomed her! She wondered, *Could Jesus be the Christ, the Messiah, the Promised One we've been waiting for?*

Close your eyes for a moment and use your imagination. *Imagine standing near a well. You're thirsty but have no way of getting any water. You see someone approaching—a man in a robe wearing sandals. He seems familiar. Someone you know. He asks: "What struggles create barriers in your life?" Maybe illness...depression...financial*

issues...racism...addictions...broken relationships...anger? He offers you a cup of water. As soon as you take a sip, you feel something in you beginning to dissolve. The pains of life begin to crumble. Your past hurts begin to liquify. Angers begin to melt. Something new begins to fill the hole in your heart. Wholeness begins to form. In response, you turn and run—not out of fear—but filled with excitement to let others know that you have encountered One who offers healing and forgiveness.

Open your eyes. As you come back to the reality of this world, may you bring with you a small cup of that living-water, saving it for another day, knowing that whatever you face, it can be dissolved by living water.

¹ <https://water.usgs.gov/edu/ga-solvent.html>

² www.disciples4water.org

³ www.businessinsider.com/how-many-days-can-you-survive-without-water-2014-5

⁴ Hodgkin, Michael. 1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 3181-3189). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #527.

⁵ www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3386