

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, March 27, 2011
Rev. John Tapscott

"LIVING IN DEPTH"

John 4:11

During the Lenten season it's been a tradition for Christians to give up something. Now this may not be so common anymore, though making a small sacrifice for the sake of God's Kingdom reminds us of the great sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. It may also draw us closer to our Lord. Now I'm not asking you to give up something during Lent. One of the problems with doing that is that it usually doesn't result in a long-term change in our behaviour. For example, I could give up going to Tim Horton's during Lent, but I can tell you right now where I would be for lunch on Easter Sunday. But rather than giving something up for Lent, perhaps you could use this time to go deeper with God, to go more in-depth in faith and devotion, perhaps by reading one or two Psalms a day or a chapter from Matthew's Gospel each day. You could get a Christian resource out of our library, a book, a DVD, a CD and use it during this season. We have many great resources, new and old in our church library. Now we ask that you sign them out and return them, but we don't charge a fine if they're overdue. Use these Lenten days to go deeper in your faith and in your relationship with God.

A great concern today is we are living broadly, but not deeply. We are inundated with information from all sides, 24 hour news channels, the internet. Anyone can become an instant expert on almost any topic. But often it's a surface kind of expertise and the shallowness can get exposed quite quickly. To be honest, most of us can really go in-depth in one or two areas in our lifetimes. Yet there are ways we can all live more in-depth.

John chapter 4 opens with Jesus coming to a Samaritan city named Sychar. Jesus was doing something unusual because Jews usually bypassed Samaritan territory. Pure-blooded Jews considered Samaritans outcasts. Samaritans had compromised their Jewishness by intermarrying with other races. But on his way to Jerusalem Jesus went right through the heart of Samaritan territory. Tired out by his journey he came at noon to Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman was there with a bucket to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." She was surprised that Jesus would speak to her, a Samaritan, and a woman at that. Jewish men avoided speaking to women in public. But again Jesus went beyond the norm. He answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is

saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," she replied, 'you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' Yes, it was a deep well, 100 feet, and it was thought that the best water came from the bottom of the well, where it percolated in from an underground stream. Usually a bucket took the more stagnant water from the top of the water column. One would need a heavy bucket to get the best water from the depths of the well.

Now this well was near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. So it was not just Jacob's well, but God's well too, given for the people's benefit in a dry land. "The well is deep." But let's turn from the gift of water and consider that there are other kinds of deep wells, too. God has given us deep wells to draw from for our blessing and strengthening. We can draw from them by reflection, study and faith. So let's think about some deep wells God has given us and what we may draw from them.

First, there is the deep well of experience.

In order to cut costs, businesses sometimes replace experienced staff with inexperienced and cheaper workers. They learn from experience that this was not such a good idea. For a thriving organization needs the energy and new ideas of new employees, but also the steady hand and acquired wisdom of experienced employees. Experience is a deep well to be drawn on.

Let's face it - the first time we go through something can be a unnerving experience. The nuclear stations in Japan were built to withstand an earthquake, but not a tsunami. It was a whole new situation with not a lot of experience to draw from. That made the crisis even worse. Hopefully engineers world-wide will now draw on that experience in their design of future nuclear facilities. Parents will tell you how uptight and careful they are in raising their first child. But with their third or fourth child, their parenting approach becomes more relaxed, because experience tells them that they'll get through. It's true in church life and ministry. Cycles and seasons and challenges come and go, and we know we'll get through them by God's grace, just as we've come through before. That experience helps us to sleep better at night.

Take the woman at the well. Jesus was given godly insight into her situation. He knew that she had had five husbands and that the man she was living with now was not her husband. Now we have to be careful in judging the woman. Men had bent the law on divorce so much that they divorced their wives for the most trivial things, like burning the toast. Maybe she was just a poor cook. Jesus' teaching on divorce in the Gospels is very conservative but it was

designed to protect women from this and to bring marriage back to God's original intention. Now the fact that the woman was not married to the man she was living with would not raise an eyebrow today - how common that is, even among God's people, though it's not what God intends. But back then it would have been a scandal. She probably came to the well alone at noon because she had been shunned by the community. And in this at least, she was culpable before God. In any case, this woman was seeking love and acceptance but wasn't finding it. But her life's experience also helped her to recognize true love and acceptance when it came to her in Jesus.

It's not surprising that many congregations have a majority of seniors or let's say, mature people. Oh I know some young people have great insight into life and know their need for God. But generally, it's as we get older and experience more of life, as we see ourselves in the light of Christ, that we more strongly know our need for divine grace and strength and hope.

Furthermore, the more you have lived and experienced, the better you can bring comfort and direction to others. One of the treasures we can draw from our experiences, especially the difficult ones, is the capacity to help others and to share in God's ministry of compassion. That's why in hospitals, survivors of a particular disease or condition are called on to counsel those who are going through the same thing for the first time. God gives us a deep well of experience, both our own and that of others, to draw on for our blessing and strengthening.

Secondly, God gives us the deep well of worship.

The Samaritans had a temple for worship on Mount Gerizim. The Jews had their great temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus told the woman that the time is coming when people will worship the Father neither on the mountain, nor in Jerusalem. "The hour is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..." So where we worship is not so important, though most of us do need a specific place and time to truly enter into the worship of God.

Worship is an awesome thing really. This is no light and trivial matter. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." Our ancestors began each worship service with that hymn, and for good reason. You see, we don't come here to meet one another, though that may be a by-product of worship. We don't come to be entertained, though there's nothing wrong with some humor and enjoyment in worship. We don't come with our eye on the clock, though we who lead worship try to respect your time and make sure it's time well spent. We come here to meet the living God who comes to meet us. We come to meet God spirit to spirit, to go deeper with him, to hear his truth in Scripture, to be

directed and formed as followers of Jesus. If we come for the wrong reasons, we stay on the surface. But when we come to worship in spirit and in truth we let down our bucket into a deep well and we draw so much from it - strength, direction, comfort, forgiveness, faith and hope and love.

The Christian faith we proclaim in worship is deep. Now on one hand our faith is basic. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." A child can memorize that and grasp it's message and come to faith. But that verse is also incredibly deep. Whole books have been written on it. One minister drew up 80 sermon outlines on that one verse alone. The Apostles Creed, the summary of Christian faith from the early Christian church, contains deep and revolutionary truths. The Christian faith is very deep, and has occupied the best minds for their whole lives. So come to this place, expecting above all, to meet God in spirit and to be grasped by his truth. Come to worship in spirit and in truth and draw on this deep well for your blessing and strengthening.

Finally, there is the deep well of Christ himself.

Jesus said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him for living water." The woman said, "Sir, where do you get this living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but the water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." "Give me this water," she said.

Well, Jesus is greater than Jacob, for Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised One, the Saviour of the world. The living water that was in Him came from his close relationship with the Father. The very life of God was in Jesus and that is the living water he offered to the woman. In Christ she saw herself as she was and as she could be, cleansed and made new. She could be filled with the very life of God which would become in her a spring welling up to eternal life. So it is for us. Christ is the God-given well of refreshment for our souls. The One who lived and died and rose again offers us living water from his endless supply. He is the One alone who can quench our spiritual thirst, our thirst for God's grace, God's love, God's forgiveness, God's salvation, God's eternity. Christ brings us God in spirit and in truth. And when you draw living water from Christ by faith, your searching stops, for you know exactly who to turn to whenever your soul is parched and dry.

"I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, but ah, the waters failed. Now none but Christ can satisfy, None other Name for me. There's love and peace and lasting joy, Lord Jesus found in thee."

