

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday Sun. That's from a Noel Coward play. Jesus is not either of these, but He is out in the mid-day sun, the hottest part of the day, sitting at a well in a town called Sychar, in the land of Samaria. Jesus and his disciples have left Jerusalem and are heading back home to Capernaum in Galilee. They are going through Samaria, altho many Jews would go around Samaria. They stop to rest at a well that is probably 1600 years old.

As Jesus sits there, a woman comes out to the well. Jesus speaks to her, which is inappropriate and odd for two reasons. One is that Jewish rabbis, of which Jesus is, which means he is a teacher, don't talk to women in public. Second, the woman is Samaritan and Jews don't usually bother to talk to Samaritans.

But because Jesus does talk to her, something very important happened to her. Jesus says, "Give me a drink." She responds with, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask of me a woman of Samaria, for a drink?" Jesus responds if you knew who I was you would ask me for living water and I would have given it to you. She likes that idea, living water and not having to come out any longer for two reasons: to save time and to save the embarrassment of being out in public. She is talked about and shunned. The woman is hurting. Life has not been and is not easy for her. She represents many people.

There is a song that goes this way, "Help o Lord the thrown away the wild and lonely ones, who wander in this frozen land, that sunlight cannot touch." The thrown away, the restless ones, the ones on the outskirts of society. Some of us may have experienced that, or we know friends or families like that, hurting.

Did Jesus just happen to be at that well, was it just a coincident? Did Jesus just happen to sit near that woman? Or was God behind that? My office secretary in North Dakota, would go to see her daughter in St. Joseph, Missouri once a year. She would go either by bus or plane. Invariably, when she came back she would tell how as she was waiting along the trip, she got into some pretty deep and important conversations, with someone who needed to be heard. She was just sitting with them.

Jesus said to Zaccheus, "I need to go to your house." He went to eat at the house of Levi, another tax collector. Jesus was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. He ended up between two criminals, who both needed him, but only one took up Jesus with his offer of living water.

Who did Jesus sit with? People who needed to know that God cared about them. People who needed living water, living water that was salvation and community from God through Jesus. Help O Lord the thrown away the wild and restless ones,

who wander in this world of woe, with no place to call home. My translation of that song.

The Lutheran church through history has made it an important part of our faith to reach out to those in need: with hospitals, with Lutheran Social Service, with Lutheran Immigration and refugee services, with Lutheran World Relief, with World Hunger Appeals, wading into areas that are sometimes not so nice or easy and trying to sit with people and bring a sense of God's living water. We, a member of the ELCA, still try to do that.

So, who do we need to sit with? In social, church and school situations or gatherings, do we notice a pattern of people sitting or being alone?

As a chaplain at the University of Virginia, one day over the course of a couple hours, I noticed a man standing by a wall, by himself, next to the area where family waited for surgery results or where ICU visitors waited. All by himself, shifting from this wall to another. I decided I needed to talk to him. He had come the day before, from some place back in the hills of Virginia or West Virginia. His wife had been taken here by ambulance. He had gotten to the hospital, but now in the hospital, he was lost. "I don't know where my wife is. I don't know how to find her." Alone and scared, he didn't know how to ask. The ICU waiting room was right there, and I connected him to the receptionist and he was taken to his wife.

There may not always be a crisis in which we need to sit with someone. At our last Concordia College Class Reunion, a person I knew pretty well, said to me, "Doug, you would often walk with me to classes or the cafeteria and I appreciated you walking with me and talking." He remembered that as being important. I had no idea that was a big deal, but he did.

Dear Lord, who do you need me to be a friend to today?
Dear Lord, who do you want me to sit with today?