

A Woman's Story

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A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Karyn Burchell-Thomas

Lent 4 A

John 4

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

Hello. Some of you might know me as Fatima. That's the name I was given, some time after my story was first told. Of course it isn't Fatima, but it's a lovely name and I'm remembered with great respect.

Of course I wasn't alive to know the name Fatima nor the respect of that time. But I do remember a time when I was first really shown respect. It was at a well. I was getting water. It was in the middle of the day and it was hot and I was alone. Normally, you know, women would go in the morning in the cool and the evening in the cool to get their water. But I was a little isolated from other women - and most other people. Perhaps you have that feeling today in your situation?

Well I was collecting the water and I met this man there. He was sitting by the well when I got there and he was wanting some water but he didn't have something to find the water with. We had a conversation for a while - which really struck me as strange. I was a woman. Nobody speaks to women if they're men. I was a Samaritan and he was a Jew. We shouldn't even be in the same place together. And it was clear that it was midday and I was probably not the person to be with anyway.

He didn't seem to mind any of that. He spoke to me and we had a long conversation about life and about what gives us life and about water. I did offer him some water, but he gave me some water as well. Not the kind that you'd find in a cup or a bowl or a jar. He gave me the water that has given me life ever since. An unquenchable water an unending water. It was quite amazing. You see, he knew my story. And it's usually my story that meant people would keep away from me.

Some have called me a Scarlet woman. As you see I don't wear scarlet, but that probably has nothing to do with it. You see I had five husbands. But of course you know that that doesn't sound easy - isn't what it might sound like. I was first married to the oldest of five brothers. He was much older than me and I was never his favoured wife, particularly as I didn't bear him a son - or indeed any children. So when he died, as is the custom, I was passed on to his next brother who took me in and cared for me. He was a good man, but again, I wasn't a favoured wife because I gave no sons and no daughters.

This happened five times. There were no brothers left - and I was literally on the street. Normally it would be the sons that would care for the aged mother. But this aged mother had no sons and so I became a person who was homeless for a while. And then a man, a man of some care took me in.

This man at the well knew this story. I don't know how he knew this story. Nobody told this story; they just kept their distance because, you know, I wasn't contributing. I wasn't a real woman to people. I had no family, no one to look after me officially. But he cared for me and showed me respect in ways I hadn't imagined. He gave me a sense of belonging and having value and worth in ways that I'd never experienced before. We talked about God being the God of all people now between Samaritans and Jews. This is another difficult conversation, but we had that as well.

I was so excited I ran back to my people and in the middle of the streets I was shouting out: *come and hear this man who knows us so well he tells us things that we don't know and yet is the truth beyond all truth that we do know.*

Somehow, something must have happened, because they came. Hearing this woman in the middle of the street in the middle of the day on her own - they came. And they heard him for themselves.

It was the beginning of a new life for me. I didn't always walk in the middle of the day on my own anymore. And yes, centuries later, I was given the name Fatima. I've almost forgotten my own name because it gets caught up with so many others along the way. But what I do remember is the story; the story that showed that each of us has something we can give to the other. That God is here for all of us and that in hearing our stories we can find more deeply the truth that might otherwise be hidden - because of our gender, or our race, or our faith, or our circumstances.

We all have stories to tell and we are living them out today. May we hear each other's story with care and compassion. May we hear each other's story with love and grace.

And, in hearing and telling our stories, may we see what is beyond what we immediately see and into something deeper that is life-giving.

Come to the well there's plenty of water to be had for all.