

Never Thirst Again

Many years ago, I was called to minister to a young man with AIDS. Mind you, this was in the later 80s when the crisis was just gaining momentum and the fear associated with the disease was unbelievable.

Before I met this person for the first time, my mind was filed with many questions: How would I react to his condition; how would I deal with his rejection by family and friends; would I be safe? The list went on and on.

I hadn't even met this human being and I had him boxed in, so to speak, in many categories that defined him: male, dying of AIDS and gay...but I would be going to him, hopefully as a minister of compassion, offering him spiritual support. In "gospel paradox," the tables were turned.

After our introductions, the situation gradually became one of encounter between two human beings, each having something to offer the other. I came to bring Christ to him, and he became Christ for me. The categories through which we filter our own biases and fears dissolve when we encounter another human being. For me the disease called AIDS, sexual orientation, risking behavior no longer entered into the equation for I saw through these categories to the person, the human being, crying for acceptance and warmth. This young man satisfied my own thirst to make a difference, that my humanity had been graced by God. And I



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know that I satisfied his thirst for human companionship and to know deep down that God was present to him — not in spite of AIDS but because of AIDS. Once again, God surprised us...

Jesus meets a woman at the well and he is thirsty for an encounter that would free her from the pain of her past and present. She came in the middle of the day after all the other women had retrieved their water. Perhaps because of her past, she wanted to be alone but instead she encountered Jesus, who saw her for who she really was. Her gender, her religion, her ethnic background and her many husbands didn't matter to Jesus. Jesus didn't categorize her or filter he humanity through pre-determined norms.

This unnamed woman came with a pitcher to be filled with water; she became a "human pitcher" filled with the water of the Jesus' Spirit. What happened between the woman and Jesus was an encounter between two people who thirsted: this woman was thirsty to discover her true husband — her third husband was not the "charm," since she was already on her sixth. The number would probably get larger...

Except that she realized that only God, Jesus could satisfy her deepest thirst. No husband in the world could give her what she wanted or needed: acceptance and empowerment to be the person who she was created to be. This can never be given by any husband, let alone by any other male.

And the woman satisfied a deep thirst of Jesus...yes, it was a two way street for he "thirsted" for her to be satisfied in the heart of her being with a Presence that would be continually poured into. She became a living well.

The young man with AIDS in my story helped me to encounter the Living God through his very humanity and in his suffering, freeing me to do what the woman did after she left Jesus: Become a well where others can encounter the Living God.