

## Bringing joy and delight to others is part of Lent

*What made the Samaritan woman run with such delight and enthusiasm to people who wouldn't give her the time of day? It was that Jesus saw her.*

It finally stopped raining when I left the church in Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, where I officiated at a wedding. Pulling out of the parking lot, I was surprised the street I needed to take was closed due to flooding. As I encountered other flooded streets, my GPS kept "recalculating." I finally came upon a street not as badly flooded. Other cars ahead of me went down this street. I followed, proceeding slowly through the water. And then I saw them. At the end of the block were a half dozen kids in bathing suits, with a gigantic cardboard sign. I slowed almost to a stop in order to read it. In big letters the sign said: SPLASH US! I looked at them and mouthed, "really?" Yes, they pleaded. I put my foot on the gas pedal, and like the Red Sea parting, the water splashed them. I heard the sound of their screaming *thank you* with delight long after I got home.

The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is an important reading for the Lenten Season. Filled with all the drama of a cable network mini-series, we encounter a woman with a complicated past, the object of gossip and shunned by neighbours. She needs to draw water in the heat of the day when no one else was at the well to judge her. Alone, except for this man Jesus. A man with whom she should not be speaking. And yet a robust conversation about life and faith takes place.

I am always drawn to the end of the story. What made the woman run with such delight and enthusiasm to people who wouldn't give her the time of day? It was that Jesus saw her. He saw not only a woman with a bucket, but a woman wounded by her own choices. And wounded by the judgement of others. She needed to feel more than remorse and regret. She needed grace to splash over her and refresh her weary soul. Despite every bad choice she made, God still chose to love her.

Jesus' disciples were shocked to discover him speaking with this woman. Their shock came from cultural and religious taboos. But they also had an unwillingness to recalculate. The risk to take a different path is part of discipleship. The woman, too, recalculates from a person overwhelmed with shame to one filled with delight and gratitude for God's grace.

We think of Lent as a serious time of penance and prayer. And it is. It is also a time to recalculate our understanding of the season. Do our conversations

with others bring them delight? This too is the work of Lent. To be seen and forgiven by God is to do the same for others.

All around us there are signs, not made of cardboard, asking us to notice someone, to bring joy and light. Others have passed them by. The challenge of Lent is to realize these are the wells where Jesus will always be found, and where he needs us to be.