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HOT AND THIRSTY

Pastor Noel Due

“A dry drunk”.

That’s how he described himself.

I’d not heard that before, but that’s what it felt like, he said.

He said:

“when you’re drinking you’re a “wet drunk”. Booze controls you. You drink to feel better, but it only goes from bad to worse in the long run. You’re soaked with drink, but can’t get enough.”

The shattered remnants of his life had washed around his feet in a sea of empty bottles. The drink destroyed everything.

With the help of friends, family, AA, and some structure in his life he’d been sober for a couple of years, but he was still parched inside...a “dry drunk” as he called it. Still gulping stuff down: life, work, sex—anything to quench it. Anything to numb the pain. To make himself feel better about who he was, what he’d done, and what he’d seen.

Anger.

It fumed inside. The embers never died. Any adverse wind sparked it; as soon as he didn’t get his own way, the bushfire took off again.

He thought that might be as good as it got.

But then it got better.

I sat in the shade, waiting for my friend. The air was still. Hot. Flies! Dust.

I saw the water pot before I noticed her; polished brass, glinting in the sun between the straggly bushes.

Then she emerged.

Eyes averted. Head low, water jug on her shoulder, heading for the well on the edge of the village. She hesitated.

She’d seen me. My white skin and clothing, so different from anyone else around.

Should she still come?

She did. Warily.

Her eyes caught mine. I smiled. She smiled. A universal language broke the uncertainty.

My friend appeared from the hut behind me.

Ah...a local! Not a lone white man in a remote Indian village, but someone with local connections.

She relaxed, stepping more confidently to the well. Her hand on the pump handle, her water pot on the ground, my friend and his family now calling good humoured greetings. The water gushed. The pot filled to overflowing.

We drove off, my mind bursting with a similar scene. Jesus, waiting by a well in the middle of the day. The heat. The dust. The woman. The well.

But, unlike me, he *knew* her. Not that he'd ever met her before. He just *knew* her—knew what made her tick, why she was coming in the heat of the day. He knew her story, felt her pain.

He wasn't there by accident.

She came alone, around noon. Avoidance; it was the way she lived. Every day.

Other women drew water at dawn or dusk. It was a social gathering as much as a practical need. She didn't fit. No one wanted her company...and she probably didn't want theirs. The village was a closed door.

She'd come for water, but her thirst was greater.

She had a reputation. Men. She attracted them, magnetically.

She'd had five husbands, and now lived with a bloke, unmarried. In those days a scandal. The women resented her. But her thirst drove her; perhaps *this* one? Maybe he'll be *The One*.

The broken bits of her life washed around her feet in a sea of shattered relationships.

Would this man, the one by the well, alone, be another?

Jesus offered her something: water that wouldn't leave her thirsty.

The well, the water, the woman. The time of day. It was all about spiritual thirst, not physical.

She needed more than her bucket and rope could reach, no matter how deep the well. Just like my friend needed more than the booze or a bottle of plonk, no matter how much he had.

In terms of relationships she was a wet drunk.

Jesus wasn't even offering to make her a dry one.

He offered something completely different: living water. Water that became its own source of life; that became a well, springing up inside. Water that had its own life, and brought life to whatever it touched.

He *knew* her. He called her out.

She'd said: "I have no husband".

Jesus said, "You speak truly. You have had five husbands and the man you're living with is not your husband".

Exposed. Nowhere to hide from his gaze. No avoidance possible here, by the well, in the sun, with the dust and flies.

But, then this man looked at her like no other.

He exposed her failure to heal it, not to ridicule. He came to give life, not condemn. His eyes were full of love. Not a trace of lust. No grasping, just giving. Life. In all its fullness.

She felt the miracle begin. Jesus saw it happening. He knew the living water was starting to flow within her...he could see it in her eyes. Her shoulders lifted. Hope dawned.

Could she be forgiven? Is there life after death...the death of one relationship after another?

It broke upon her. This man loved her like no other. The water he offered cleansed and healed. He gave the water of his Spirit and she received new life into hers.

No more Avoidance.

She left the water pot behind, a sign of so much isolation; the reminder of thirst she couldn't quench the symbol of hot dusty, rejection.

She left it where it sat. She had other water to carry now.

She ran into the village, telling all the people that she had met a man who told her all she'd ever done. No need to hide from her past. No need to hide from her present.

The people saw the change.

They flocked out to see the man. To hear his words. Could they *also* be healed?

The woman at the well. My friend the dry drunk. Me.

We've all had our life wash around our feet in broken bits and pieces.

And Jesus' offer still stands. He still gives living water to cleanse and heal.

Avoidance. Isolation. Loneliness.

They're not the last words for any of us.

Jesus said “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”

Take him at his word. What he says is true.

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