

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher! Stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

## First Impressions

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

First impressions make an impression, don't they? Take the Bible story about the woman at the well, for instance. What's your impression of this hard-living woman?

Personally, she strikes me as the type of individual you'd find at a Laundromat at 3 AM, a haggard woman with a poor-paying job. Given the details in the biblical passage, I also imagine her dressing a bit too young for her age and sporting a bit too many tattoos on her arms.

In other words, she is not someone with whom I'd be inclined to strike up a conversation.

Not many people would. After all, she comes to the well in the heat of the day, when no one else is around to snub her. So I see her with a nervous look in her eye, the type of woman you who goes to go to a bar on Saturday night only to spend the entire evening sitting alone at a table.

This is how I see this woman walking down the path toward the well, a woman whose soul is as empty as a water jar hoisted on her shoulder. And yet, Jesus decides to engage this woman in conversation. And what a conversation it turns out to be!

"Your people worship God in Jerusalem," she spouts, "What's wrong with our town? Aren't we good enough?" Her words are direct, some of them sarcastic.

When Jesus asks, "Where's your husband?" I can't help but see her roll her eyes and spit her reply like a plug of tobacco. "I don't have one!"

But Jesus sees through the tough façade. He sees more than a woman with an empty jar. He knows her better than she knows herself. He knows that it is *her heart* that is dying of thirst. It's *her soul* that is in need of water.

How good are you at spotting this sort of thing? Can you spot a desperate soul in the face of a teenage puck whose eyes are a little too intense? Can you sense the presence of vacant souls in the eyes that stare out from the mug shots posted on the post office wall? Just how good are you at spotting a soul running on empty?

Truth be told, we bump into them every day. The brother-in-law who called you last week to ask for another loan. The co-worker who bad-mouths you in the break room. The boss that slams his fist on the desk.

We might be good at gauging the spiritual condition of a difficult person, but the story about the woman at the well tells us that Jesus is good at seeing beyond appearances and hard shells.

Including our own.