



Woman at the Well

John 4:4-26
Guinea-Bissau, Easter 2011

Woman, give me to drink
You hide half your face
and more of your history

But you have water.
Can we start here now
with water?

Four centuries of men came
captured your kin
left you with little
Yet you had this well,
this water, long before

And yes you have had more
than one husband all deserted you
left you *noma*, gaunt
with AIDS and little else

But you have water.
Even those men, if solely by god-grace,
have water
and don't we all?
Could you ever begin anew with that,
with this water?

Water that might slake my thirst,
stranger that I am in your land
Water that drawn now from your well
could quell my censure
of that selfsame water wallowed by swine
in your dirty dooryard days before
but since redeemed by its slow subterranean sojourn
So that neither you nor I nor your daughters
will die the water-demon's algid death

Would you that I, this thirsty stranger, prune
your trees, dress your wounds, fend off
your fevers, teach your children, build
your church?

Or sit first at
your well,
hear your story, hoping someday,
we are, all of us, baptized
with forgiveness?

Ronald E. Pust, MD

Dr. Pust (AQA, University of Arizona, 2010) is professor of Family & Community Medicine and co-director of Global Health Distinction Track at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. His address is: University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1450 N. Cherry Avenue, Tucson, Arizona 85719. E-mail: rpust@email.arizona.edu.
Illustration by Erica Aitken.