

**+ John 4:4-26 + Fix Your Eyes on Jesus—The Living Water! +
+ 3rd Sunday in Lent + Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 19 March 2017 +**

“He had to travel through Samaria.” Jesus didn’t really “have” to go there. Nothing geographical or political forced him to pass through the region of Samaria on his way home to Galilee. Jesus had just finished spending some time in the holy city of Jerusalem. He had celebrated Passover, cleared the temple, and had an evening conversation with one of Israel’s teachers—a man named Nicodemus. It was time to head back home to the region of Galilee, but which route would Jesus take? The shortest route passed straight through Samaria, but many Jews chose to take the longer, more difficult route around Samaria along the Jordan River. You see, they wanted to avoid the “half-breed,” mixed-religion Samaritans. They hated the Samaritans, and the feeling was mutual.

Yet Jesus **“had to travel through Samaria.”** It was necessary for Jesus to travel there because thirsty souls lived there who needed relief. In particular, there was a thirsty soul in a little village called Sychar who needed living water. Funny thing is the woman didn’t know Jesus would bring her that relief.

Now the land of Israel is not known for its rain-drenched valleys and lush vegetation. In fact, Israel during the late spring and early summer can get terribly hot with scorching winds blowing across from the desert. The noon sun was high in the sky as Jesus and his disciples trudged to the outskirts of the Samaritan town of Sychar. To get there from Jerusalem they had walked forty miles north over dusty, rocky roads through rough terrain. Jesus was hot and tired. He had a long journey behind him and a longer journey ahead of him. So they stopped at the well Jacob had dug for his family centuries before.

As the searing sun beat down, Jesus’ disciples left him there at the ancient well outside of Sychar while they went into town to grab a bite to eat. Naturally, Jesus was thirsty. He needed water to quench his thirst, but he had not come to that well outside that town to get a drink. Just then, a woman approached the well to get water for herself and her household. Normally women drew water from the deep well early in the morning or later in the evening, but this woman wanted to avoid the local women and their gossip. This woman had a past. Her adulteries were well-known in the community. The woman had had five husbands and was living with a man who wasn’t her husband. She was an outcast cut off from her neighbors and family and friends. A conversation with a Jewish rabbi was the last thing she wanted.

...But there was Jesus sitting by the well—tired and thirsty...and waiting for her. When she approached the well, Jesus said to her, **“Give me a drink.”** Now this was a moment of culture shock for the woman. Jews never willingly interacted with Samaritans, let alone Samaritan women, and Samaritans avoided Jews like the plague. If they did interact, all you’d hear would be words that cut and sliced and stabbed with scorn and hatred. So you can understand why this woman was so shocked when Jesus genuinely asked her for a drink of water. She responded, **“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?”** Jesus had a good reason, but he really wasn’t looking for a drink. He had something more important for her.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.” Jesus held out to this disgraced woman the one thing that would bring her relief and even reconciliation with God, but she just couldn’t see who was asking her for a drink or what it was that Jesus was saying. **“Sir...you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’?”**

Jesus spoke more clearly. **“Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”** Jesus wasn’t talking about the plain, old water down in that well. He was talking about the waters of eternal life, waters that would give her new life with God in this life and an eternity of life in heaven someday. Unfortunately, the woman didn’t get it. She actually figured that Jesus had some supernatural way that would end her long, lonely trips for water once and for all. **“Sir...give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”**

Jesus knew this woman needed something more than the water she slowly dragged up from Jacob’s well. Her soul was so thirsty with a restless longing for love and with guilt-ridden shame, but the Samaritan woman didn’t realize how desperately she needed relief. Like those lonely, noontime walks to drag up water from Jacob’s well, this woman was constantly searching for whatever could quench the burning thirst in her soul. So she ended up looking for relief in all the wrong places. Yet no matter how hard she tried, she could never satisfy her thirsty soul. Like drinking salt water, the woman’s personal sins actually made her thirst worse. They blinded her to Jesus’ grace-filled offer of **“living water”** for her soul. So Jesus showed the woman what her real problem was.

Jesus told her, ***“Go, call your husband...and come back here.”*** ***“I don’t have a husband,”*** she replied. As the all-knowing God, Jesus knew that already. That’s why he asked, but that woman needed to see why she was looking for relief in all the wrong places. ***“You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband...For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.’”***

Imagine the shocked look on that woman’s face as Jesus, a total stranger, recounted her entire immoral love life with every last partner past and present. He knew exactly why she was an outcast in her community forced to draw water during the heat of the day away from the gossiping women. He knew how her lifestyle and disregard for God’s will regarding his gifts of sex and marriage were leading her towards an eternity of unquenchable thirst in the unquenchable fires of hell. He knew how desperately she needed his help.

He also knew she would try to change the subject to something much less uncomfortable like we typically do. When she tried to change the subject to a common point of disagreement between Jews and Samaritans—the matter of where they should worship, Jesus deftly guided her back to his living waters. ***“Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...An hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”*** How would she be able to truly worship the Lord? The answer that would change her life forever was standing right in front of her.

You see, this entire discussion wasn’t about the water in the well at all. Pretty soon the woman started realizing that Jesus cared more about her thirsty soul than his personal thirst. Like so many before her, she longed to see the coming of the Messiah—God’s Anointed—who would bring living water to thirsty souls like hers. So Jesus told her, ***“I who speak to you am he,”*** and he quenched the thirst of another parched soul at his eternal spring of living water.

You and I are more like that woman than we realize. Your sins are likely different, yet they blind you just as much to your need for Christ’s ***“living water”*** of forgiveness and eternal life. You don’t realize how spiritually thirsty you really are. You’re constantly searching for whatever can quench that burning thirst in your soul—maybe it’s love, maybe it’s money, maybe it’s attention, maybe it’s success, maybe it’s family. Whatever it might be, you look for relief in all the wrong places as you gratify your sinful cravings or try to quiet your growing guilt—all the time blindly ignorant that Jesus has real relief for your soul.

Yet when the all-knowing Jesus looks at your heart and mind, what does he see? He sees all the reasons why you are so spiritually thirsty. He sees your lust and your greed and your envy and your worry. He sees your hidden sins and your public sins. He sees you argue and doubt and backbite. He sees your foolishness. He sees how you sidle up to some because they meet your standards and how you avoid others because of how they look or talk or act. He sees your disregard for his holy will, and he sees that you naturally have a thirst that will become eternally unquenchable in hell. He knows what you’ve done and what I’ve done. He knows what we have all failed to do. He knows we all deserve hell. He knows that by nature you won’t be able to find relief for your thirsty soul in your attempts to bury your guilt or justify your actions.

Jesus knows all that, yet he still tells you and me, ***“If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would ask him, and he would give you living water.”*** Jesus wants you to realize that he is the source of living water for your thirsty soul. He is the source of forgiveness and mercy and peace and relief and life. He does not turn his back on you, but instead comes to you as the author and perfecter of your faith, who freely gives you the waters of forgiveness and life and eternal satisfaction in him. ***“Whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”***

It all started with the life-giving waters of Holy Baptism. At Baptism, the Lord refreshed your thirsty soul forever with the power of his almighty Word connected with actual water. The Lord dug inside of you a well of faith to give you access to his ever-flowing spring of forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus quenches your thirst with living water he poured out for you through his perfect life of obedience to his heavenly Father, through his innocent death on the cross, and through his glorious victory at the empty tomb. By doing so, he makes you ***“a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”***

So how did that Samaritan woman respond to all this? She responded with a genuine desire to worship the true God and then to tell all the people she knew so they too could enjoy Christ’s living waters. We can respond in the same way!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians (12:1-2), ***“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.”*** Let your life be one of worship to the Lord as that living water springs up inside you through faith. Let your life be filled with praise to the Lord with thoughts, actions, and words in line with his will. Let your life be filled with praise to the Lord as you come to worship regularly and study God’s Word, as you invite others to enjoy Christ’s living water with you. Daily quench your thirst in those waters and share them with every thirsty soul you meet. My friends, fix your eyes on Jesus—the Living Water who brings you real relief! Amen.