

Jesus Gives Living Water!

(John 4:4-26) ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

In Christ Jesus who alone quenches our spiritual thirst, dear fellow redeemed,

Water is crucial to life. We know this because we've been told this. But sometimes it takes our life experiences to really drive home the importance of what we've been taught. Case in point: an experience I had last summer. Cindy and I were at our camper, working on building a new deck. It was a hot day in July. I began to sweat, a lot. Several times Cindy suggested that we stop and drink some water. Each time, I decided to keep on working. "Let's get this done!" I told her. About two hours into the project, I began to feel lightheaded and moments later my head started to pound. The next thing I knew, I did a face plant into the dirt.

I was only out a few seconds, but of course, Cindy saw the whole thing. She rushed to my aid as I was trying to brush the dirt from my sweaty face. I felt shame and embarrassment. I was upset with myself and I was bracing for what I knew would be a well-deserved, "I told you so."

Today we meet a lady who had some thirst issues of her own, a lady who, no doubt, was also dealing with an onslaught of feelings and emotions. Like me, she needed to learn how vital water is to our life and well-being – in this case, our spiritual life and well-being. We'll take a closer look at her story and ours under the theme: **Jesus Gives Living Water!** 1) to sin-parched souls, 2) with everlasting benefits.

Our story begins with the gospel writer, John, sharing two interesting pieces of information. In verse 9 he tells us that "...**Jews do not associate with Samaritans.**" That might have been a bit

of an understatement. In fact, the two people groups were so at odds, that Jewish travelers would refuse to pass through Samaria, instead, going miles out of their way to bypass the territory altogether. And yet, when it comes to Jesus who was Jewish, John also tells us, “...**he had to go through Samaria.**” (John 4:4) He had to! Why? Because saving love compelled him to go on a rescue mission even though it meant traveling to a place where he wasn’t welcome.

I suppose Jesus had this in common with the woman he met that day at Jacob’s well in the Samaritan town of Sychar. Although a Samaritan herself, it seems she was a bit of an outcast among the people of that place. This may explain why she showed up at that well at such an unlikely hour. It was high noon, so called because that’s the time of day when the sun and thermometer are at their highest points. It certainly wasn’t the time of day you wanted to be lugging around a heavy container of water. That’s a chore that the ladies of the community we often do together in the cool of the evening. They’d gather at the well, where they’d spend some time chatting and sharing the latest gossip—gossip that, from time to time, may have been about the very woman whom Jesus had just met. Maybe in an attempt to avoid humiliation that woman made it her practice to go to the well at noon when she was sure no one else would be there.

But on this day, someone was there – a stranger who asked her for a drink of water. His accent tipped her off to the fact that he was Jewish. The woman quickly pointed out the social awkwardness of his request: “**You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?**” (John 4:9). Jesus answered: “**If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.**” (John 4:10). As the conversation continued, Jesus tried to make it clear that he wasn’t talking about ordinary water. The water he was giving away has everlasting benefits: “**Everyone who drinks this water [from Jacob’s well] will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**” (John 4:13-14). “**Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.**” (John 4:15).

Despite the Savior’s best attempts, the Samaritan Woman was still thinking about well water. How great it would be if she’d never have to lug water ever again! But more to the point, how great it would be if she never had to encounter the townspeople or suffer their insults. With the gift that Jesus was offering, she could keep to her self and live life as she pleased. Jesus’ offer sounded great!

But of course, she didn’t know the half of it. She hadn’t yet come to grips with her greatest need. Unaware of her real problem, she could only think to deal with the symptoms of that problem. You might say that this woman didn’t have a clue as to how thirsty she really was and what that spiritual thirst was doing to her. Thankfully, Jesus knew, and he cared enough about her to show her the hard truth about her life. He told her, “**Go, call your husband and come back.**”¹⁷ “**I have no husband,**” she replied. Jesus said to her, “**You are right when you say you have no husband.¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.**” (John 4:16-18).

Now we’ve come to the heart of the problem. This woman was broken by the sin she had inherited from her parents. In her fallen condition, she suffered from a sin-parched soul. She thirsted for meaning, purpose, and value. She longed for peace, security, and contentment. In her case, she had tried to quench this thirst through a series of failed relationships with at least six different men. It was in love for her soul that Jesus wanted her to see and understand that her biggest problem wasn’t what people were saying about her. Her biggest problem was her broken relationship with God. Because of it, she was looking for worth and fulfillment in all the wrong places. It was making her miserable, and unless something changed, her earthly sorrows would eventually give way to eternal misery in hell, a place where the sinner’s thirst can never be quenched – not ever.

In one brief conversation, Jesus connected with this woman. His words had their desired effect. You and I, of course, have a great advantage over this woman. Jesus isn’t some stranger to us. His

grace found us at some point in our past. His love compelled him to first meet many of us, not at a well but at the baptismal font. Saving love compels him to keep meeting with us, here in his Word and in the sacrament. Knowing this, let's imagine ourselves at Jacob's well. Jesus comes to us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our struggles and their cause. He knows that we are thirsty. He knows that like the Samaritan women, we spend too much of our time trying to quench our thirst in ways that aren't healthy for us but, in fact, are spiritually harmful to us. We just heard how Jesus demonstrated this truth for the Samaritan woman, sending her to fetch a husband that didn't exist. So, what is it that he would send us for? Maybe he'd say to some of us, "Go get your calendar!" because we are people who pin all our purpose and meaning to being busy and productive. Maybe he'd say to us, "Go get your business card or your report card!" Because we try to find our worth in the titles we hold or the good grades we get. Maybe he'd say, "Bring me that 1st place trophy that's on your shelf, or the plaque that reads 'Best Mom Ever!'" because we find our value in the awards and accolades people give us. Maybe he'd say, "Bring me your bank statement." because we seek our security in the money we make. But what happens when the bank balance dwindles? What happens when the accolades fade or when we lose our titles? What happens when we fail, when we can no longer be busy and productive? What happens then to our value and worth, our sense of purpose and well-being?

The Samaritan woman began to understand that she had a spiritual problem, but she still wasn't sure how to fix it. Where should she go? To the place that the Samaritans worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, or would peace come only through a pilgrimage to Jerusalem? She is so very thirsty for an answer. Jesus seeks to satisfy her thirst, telling her: **"...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."** (John 4:23-24). Jesus wanted her to know and believe that worship is not simply a case of going through the right motions or saying the right words at the right place. No, the only kind of worshiper that God seeks is the one whose spirit finds rest in the truth of God's promises.

Once again Jesus makes a connection. What he tells the woman makes her think of God's promised Messiah, the Christ. She tells Jesus, **"When he comes, he will explain everything to us."** Then Jesus declared, **"I, the one speaking to you—I am he."** (John 4:25-26).

With these powerful words Jesus gives that woman and each of us living water. It's Jesus, only Jesus, who gives our life value and worth, by gifting to us the holiness he produced with her perfect love for God and neighbor. This holiness covers us every moment of every day. No matter what we've been or done, no matter how the world views us, all that matters is how God sees us. And how is that? The Father, our Father always sees and proclaims us his saints for the sake of his Son. How can this be? What about our many sins and all the damage they've done to us and others? Here again, Jesus is the answer. He met our greatest need when he claimed our sin as his very own. He carried the crushing burden of our guilt and shame to the cross and from there, to dungeon of hell itself where he suffered all the anger of God we had earned, and he kept suffering until every bit of our sin-debt was paid. We know it's true, because not only did Jesus say it, he proved it three days later when he rose from the dead, and by that powerful act, turned the grave of every believer into the doorway of heaven.

It's embarrassing, isn't it to know and believe these truths, and yet to think how often we have sought our worth in things and people other than Jesus. But don't despair, my friends, our God forgives us fully and freely in the name of his Son. No matter how foolish or careless we are, God never fails to remind us that it's time for a water break. With him, there is never an "I told you so!" There is, instead, only his pardon and peace for our thirsty souls in Christ Jesus. Amen.