

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 12, 2023

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

John 4:5-26

### **Water for the Thirsty**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Human beings need water. That is why many civilizations grew around sources of water. The fertile crescent in the Middle East was populated because of the rivers. Egypt's population was near the Nile River. People avoid living where water is scarce, unless we can figure out a way to get water. Reservoirs are created and wells are dug. It was at such a well that Jesus convinces a woman of her greatest need. Hint: it is not for physical water at the bottom of the well. It is for Jesus, the living water who gives eternal life. In order to receive this living water, one first needs to be convinced that they are thirsty for such water. Then Christ quenches our spiritual thirst forever.

*So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

This was not a chance meeting. Jesus had to go this way and certainly planned to meet this particular woman at this historic well. She was a Samaritan and John reminds us that Jews do not associate with such people. Samaritans lived within the borders of the Promised Land but they were not Jews. Their ancestors had been forced to move into this region by the Assyrians who also deported the Israelites who had lived there. The hatred and mistrust between Jews and Samaritans had not improved over the many centuries since these events happened.

But Jesus has no grudges and does not continue the family feud. He talks with this Samaritan. What is even more surprising is that he talks with a woman and even asks her for a drink. This woman is shocked that he, a Jewish man, would interact with her, a Samaritan woman. Jesus does not allow man-made barriers to stop him from bringing the living water to thirsty people.

Are there barriers today that keep us from bringing God's Word to certain categories of people? Sinful humans like to make such rules, if only in our own minds. I won't talk with a person who is ...fill in the blank. Maybe we divide on culture or ethnicity or economic status or education or political views or anything else. If we think, "I am not going to talk to that person about Jesus because ..." then this account is for us. Jesus leads this Samaritan woman to great spiritual truth.

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." "Sir," she said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals." Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life." "Sir, give me this water," the woman said to him, "so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

Just like Nicodemus in the previous chapter, she could not understand what Jesus was telling her. She could only think of physical water. She could only think of the long walk to the well each day to get

water. If only she didn't have to walk out and draw water, life would be good. If only she could get some miraculous water that quenched thirst forever, life would be so much better.

We can often be short sighted too. If only I had a little extra income, life would be good. If only I didn't have this health problem, life would be great. If only this was true in my life, I would be happy. While there is some truth to these thoughts, there is also a lot missing, namely eternal life. If our hope is only for a good life in this life, we are missing out on perfection for eternity.

Jesus promised this woman eternal life and she thought about temporal thirst. So he gets her to think about spiritual matters. He shows her that she is spiritually thirsty.

*Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband, and come back here." "I have no husband," the woman answered. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say, 'I have no husband.' In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."*

If Jesus provided this woman with an unending supply of water and food and money and health, she would still have a great need. For she had made a mess of her life in terms of marriage. She had not kept the Sixth Commandment – You shall not commit adultery. Five times she was married and five times divorced. Certainly, the husbands were not innocent in these marriages and divorces either and Jesus could have said something similar to them, but she was at the well. Even if she was innocent in all of her five marriages, she was not living according to God's will for marriage now. She had a man now she was living with as if he were a husband, even though he was not. Her great need was to be forgiven for her sins against the Sixth Commandment and all other sins. This was the thirst Jesus showed her by the law.

What would Jesus say to you if you were at the well of Jacob with him? Would he ask you to call your husband or wife and point out how you are living in rebellion to his will for marriage? Would he ask you to call in an accountant to go through your finances and see how you have been mismanaging God's money that has been entrusted to you? Would Jesus tell you to go get your children to find out how you exasperated them by inconsistent rules and failed to forgive them as Christ forgives? Would he ask you to call in your parents to find out how you dishonored them? We have a great need for the living water Jesus offers the Samaritan woman. We are thirsty for his forgiveness for we too have sinned against our God in many ways.

Jesus has succeeded in moving this woman from thinking about the water in the bottom of the well to thinking about her spiritual thirst.

*"Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

Worship is where God comes to his people. This woman wants to know where that is? She wants to be able to worship the Lord properly by being in the right place. She soon finds out that she is in the best place at that moment.

*The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."*

She is with her God at that moment. The one speaking to her at the well is the same God who called himself "I AM" when speaking to Moses from the burning bush. This is such an incredible moment. Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah, not to a huge crowd, but to one woman at a well. No one else was there. This revelation was for her, a woman whose sins were well known to her and to her neighbors and to God. The Christ came to her, a woman who had been through the pain of divorce five times. He came to her to give her the living water of the gospel. God has sent his Christ to her, to forgive her. Her thirst for forgiveness is quenched through Jesus. Her life is now better because Jesus is with her on that day and she will be with her Savior forever. Her life is good now because she has eternal life to look forward to through Christ.

Jesus comes to us today too. He does not meet us at the well, but comes to us through his Word. He proclaims the gospel to us to quench our thirst for forgiveness. He tells us of his great love for us, his innocent sacrifice upon the cross and his glorious resurrection to quench our thirst for certainty of eternal life. He comes to us in public worship as we gather together in his name to receive the living water of his Word and Sacraments. Jesus is truly present with us to quench our greatest thirsts and meet our greatest needs.

Amen.