

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 flocks and herds?”

¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him 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 fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, 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 spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in 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 who speak to you am he.” (John 4:7-26)

The Woman at the Well: Living Water

A month or two ago, my parents surprised me: they moved from Texas to North Carolina. Now, my dad is 80 years old but they bought what sounds like their dream house. You know what they love about it? It: it’s right on the water. Apparently, their yard runs right up to Albemarle Sound. They’ve always loved the water. And, of course, they’re not alone. Everywhere in Michigan, people love waterfront property. Even with the threat of flooding and the reality of mosquitos, it’s always more expensive. Water is the heart of our conversation with Christ for today. But not a lake or an ocean. Not water as scenery or water for boating or swimming or waterskiing. Water is life. If you stop eating, you can actually live for a few weeks, even a month or more. But without water, your body will usually die within a few days. In Israel, access to water was absolutely essential. So, in Jesus’ day, people spent enormous amounts of time and effort going to wells and springs and lugging jars of water back to their homes. That reality drove the image Jesus used to share the gospel in this morning’s conversation with Christ: **living water**.

I.

Jesus was traveling through Samaria – that middle region between the two Jewish territories of Judea and Galilee. The Samaritans were not Jews. They still exist today. There are about 800 Samaritans in two villages in Israel, one of which is right where Jesus met this woman. In New Testament times, the village was called Sychar. It sits in valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans were mixed race – a combination of Jews and Gentiles and they had a different text of the Bible. Their version had been editing to make the claim that they were the true people of God. For all those ethnic and theological reasons, the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along. Usually, Jews went around Samaria when they traveled from Galilee to Judea.

But at least twice, Jesus took a short cut through Samaria. That caused issues, because Jews did not ordinarily associate with or even talk to Samaritans. Certainly, a rabbi would never make himself unclean by interacting with them. But Jesus defied all those customs and prejudices when he offered this woman **living water**. He offered her **an invitation to faith**.

Jesus started the conversation. He and the disciples had stopped at a place called Jacob's Well. The disciples left Jesus there by the well while they went into the village to buy food. That's when this woman came to draw water. And Jesus asked her for a drink. She was stunned that a Jew would ask her for a drink. But then Jesus said, **"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."**

But the woman asked, **"Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"** Does it seem like she was being kind of dense? She wasn't. In Greek, Jesus was making a play on words. In Greek, "living water" means "fresh water." In places in Israel where there were no springs or wells, they dug cisterns to store rain water. Of course, that water got stagnant. The Jews often called it "dead water." So, when Jesus said that he could give her "living water" this woman heard "fresh water" – the kind of water that she had come to the well to get, so she wouldn't have to go to all the work of drawing it. But she wondered how Jesus was going to get it. Jacob's Well goes down at least a hundred feet. And she could see Jesus didn't have a bucket!

Jesus wasn't talking about the water in the well. He said, **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** Now, this wasn't an easy statement to understand. But the key was the last part: the spring welling up to eternal life. Jesus was offering her heaven. That's the point. God has given us the gospel, the water of life. It becomes a real and living force in our hearts. It gives us the greatest blessing we could ever have, life with him forever.

Now, Jesus was very creative in finding a way to offer her that gospel. He didn't just stop this woman and say, "Hey, you wanta get to heaven?" But everything he did say was geared toward getting her to hear and understand the promise of the gospel. That is such an important thing for us to understand. God has called us to be his witnesses. The principal tool we have is the gospel, the good news that Jesus has won eternal life for us. Our only job is to share that good news. But we live in a world where people don't really have much interest in that message. They'd much rather talk about yoga or eastern spirituality or their own ideas. So, our job is to make that offer in a way that engages them. Now, the power to change their hearts is totally God's. Only the Holy Spirit working through the gospel will make an unbeliever into a believer. But it is our job to present that message – and to be as clear as we can be in teaching it. And it is also our job to be creative and thoughtful so that people actually talk with us and listen to what we say. To put it another way, our job is to get a hearing, to get people to listen while we share the gospel and the Holy Spirit works. In other words, it's our job to offer living water.

II.

Jesus made that offer of living water that would well up to eternal life. But the woman focused on the first part of what he said – not being thirsty again. How much do you think her water jug weighed? How many times a day did she have to walk from her home in the village out to this well? How great would it have been to never be thirsty again, to never need to carry that heavy water container back home? So, she said: **"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."**

Jesus told her to go call her husband and come back. Why did he say that? Was he exasperated because she didn't get it? Did he think that her husband might understand this better? No. Jesus knew better. But he did want to shift gears. He wanted to move her away from her focus on physical things to the promise of faith and life. So, Jesus did something here that is absolutely essential to all sharing of the gospel, but something that is absolutely horrifying to many people today: he preached the law to her. That's why he told her to call her husband and come back.

She, of course, immediately said that she didn't have a husband. That's when Jesus put the hammer down. He said, **"You are right when you say you have no husband. 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."** Ouch! You can't fool all-knowing Son of God. This woman was guilty of real and serious sin. But notice, Jesus also knew when he had said enough. He didn't feel it was necessary to add, "And every time you got a divorce that

was a sin. Every time you have sex with that man that's not your husband, that's a sin, because living together just isn't right in God's eyes. You deserve to go to hell." All that was true. But Jesus adopted a very pastoral tone. He treated this woman with Christian love. He knew that her conscience would react to the very pointed statement he had already made and he knew what it was time to be done.

Jesus is a model here for us in our discipline of our children and in our efforts to share the gospel with others. He doesn't hesitate to confront sin. But he knows the conscience that God built into us. It's not our job to hammer away at people until we make them feel bad. It's our job to speak the word of God and let the Holy Spirit convict them of sin and then to bring the good news of forgiveness.

Jesus' approach worked. You can tell, because she changed the subject. She didn't want to dwell on the guilt she felt over the long history of bad choices she had made. So, she turned to a doctrinal question. One of the key issues between Jews and Samaritans was the location of the one true sanctuary for God's people. The Jews, of course, pointed to Jerusalem and the temple there. But the Samaritans had a sanctuary at Mt. Gerizim, in site of where Jesus and this woman were talking – which is why Samaritans still live in this village. And it was a real and important doctrinal question, so Jesus didn't ignore it. He made two points in his answer. First of all, there is a right answer. The Jews had the true scripture and salvation is from the Jews. But the other point is that the Old Testament era was coming to an end. In the New Testament era, there wouldn't be one sanctuary that all believers are required to go to for worship and sacrifice. True worship is in the heart. It's faith in Jesus as our Savior. God isn't looking to recreate Old Testament Judaism. He's looking for people who trust in Jesus and worship their Savior, whether it's here at Peace or on Mt Gerizim or anywhere else in the world.

This is an important part of the conversation. It reminds us that sin breeds confusion. All false doctrine comes from our inability to process what God says. Our sinful hearts often wish that God would say something different and sometimes we convince ourselves that he does. Our sinful minds read something and completely misunderstand it and that can cause all kinds of questions and confusion in our faith. The world around us challenges what God says, and we're not always equipped to defend our faith. Sometimes, we don't really want to. All that is sin and it deserves God's condemnation in hell.

But Jesus carefully brought the focus back to his love and work. He is the answer to guilt and confusion. This woman tried to avoid feeling guilty by bringing up a theological question. And we might encounter people who will do the same thing by bringing up fellowship or the roles of woman or gay rights or whatever. And we can't misrepresent what the Bible says. But Jesus guided the whole conversation back toward the last thing he said. When he told this woman that the Jews were right, she tried to weasel out of that point. She said that when the Messiah came, he would explain everything to them. And Jesus said, **"I who speak to you am he."**

My friends, that is the living water. That is the gospel. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Christ, the One God sent. Jesus is the Savior. What do we do when we feel guilty? How do we deal with it? We turn to Jesus. God sent him to die and rise for us. And he planned to do that even before he made the world. Jesus lived in our place. He died and took away our sin and rose and forgave us. He controlled all things so that someone taught us the gospel, just like Jesus did for this woman. They showed us the truth. And the Holy Spirit worked in our hearts and gave us faith.

Jesus didn't care that this woman wasn't Jewish. He loved her and he saved her. Jesus doesn't care who we are or aren't. He doesn't care how ugly we are or how unlikeable. He doesn't care how sinful we have been. He came to us in the gospel and he made us his. And he still comes in that message and heals our confusion and doubts. Sometimes, when unbelievers bring up those theological issues, we don't know what the answer is. Sometimes, we might have to admit that we wrestle with the issue they're bringing up. We might be uncomfortable with what God actually says. But in the gospel, God heals us. He gives us the faith that trusts him and accepts his word, even when it's hard for us to understand.

And that gospel is the power we need to share the good news. Are we ready to cross lines and talk to people who make us uncomfortable because they're so different from us? That's hard, isn't it? But the gospel is God's power to overcome our discomfort. We cannot share the gospel without confronting sin. We cannot talk about Jesus to people who don't know him without encountering confusion and arguments – all the obstacles that the devil throws in the path of our outreach. But the good news about Jesus is the power of God. It is the only thing in all this world that can conquer the doubts and confusion and unbelief of the people out

there. It is the only thing that can give them peace when they wrestle with guilt. Jesus gives us **living water**. He gives us **a cure for guilt and confusion**. Drink from that water. Share that water with the world around you. Amen.