

So Thirsty

John 4: 5-42

Lent 3

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So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He

told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

“To begin with, I have three counts against me. First, I am a woman, and to be born a woman is to have abilities you cannot use and dreams you cannot fulfill. It is to be vulnerable, to have little control over your life, even over your own body. It is to hunger for something-or someone-and never to be satisfied.

Second, I am a Samaritan, a member of a small, despised group surrounded by people who feel innately superior, and that is strange, for we and the Jews all look back to Sarah and Abraham, to Rebekah and Isaac, to Leah and Rachel and Jacob. We worship the One God, although in different places.

Third, there is my reputation. It does sound rather bad: five husbands, and then living with a man to whom I am not married. A woman is never allowed to forget her past, no matter how sincere her repentance and blameless her new life.....

So, let me tell you my story. I have lived all my life in the village of Sychar. Like most towns, it is built around a well, the gathering place for news and gossip.....One day about noon, as I approached Jacob’s well, I saw a man from a distance sitting on the curbing,...As I came closer I could tell from his dress that he was a Jew, and I resented his presence. What was he doing in Samaria? Why had he stopped at *my* well? ¹

This imaginary personal recounting by Elizabeth Watson who reflects upon being the Samaritan woman at the well, invites to consider what it would have been like to encounter this tired and thirsty Jewish prophet who seemed to have no business in this enemy territory of Samaria. Jews went out of their way to avoid crossing through there, and certainly would never speak to a Samaritan, drink from the same well, share a drinking vessel, or to speak to one another. And absolutely impossible ever would be a public conversation in either culture between a man and a woman unknown to each other.

Yet these things did happen, and oh so much more.

Jesus broke boundaries and barriers all along the way. For the first time in his ministry he moved beyond the comfortable and familiar Jewish world that he knew and stepped over a simple geographical line to cross a bold and decisive cultural line to the land, life, culture and faith of Samaria. Jesus stepped into a brand-new world that contrasted all that he had known. He shattered the boundaries of gender roles, faith beliefs, shared personal objects, social convention and especially the wall between the chosen people and the rejected people, all to bring the gift of living water.

In the light of day Jesus comes seeking the water that quenches thirst as offers life-affirming, life-giving, living water, to show that God’s grace is for all. Worship is an offering of spirit and truth, not a matter of place, of here or there.

Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman at the well, and not in the simple, surface conversation of people casually meeting, but deeply, boldly, personally, intimately. His initial request for a simple cup of cold water becomes an almost immediate recognition that she has had

¹ Watson, Elizabeth G. *Wisdom’s Daughters: Stories of Women Around Jesus*. Cleveland OH, The Pilgrim Press, 1997. 22-25

five husbands and now lives with a man who is not her husband. He is able to see beyond all the dark, painful secrets and stumbles of her past that she hides for fear of not being accepted or understood. Surprisingly, she does not deny the truth of her life, or offer any defense, but rather instantly and graciously perceives that this is no itinerant Jew but must indeed be the Messiah. Jesus sees her, welcomes her as she is, sees her inner thirst, and she instantly recognizes and accepts this for the gift and healing that it is. He offered, and she received living water, water that is eternal life as it refreshes our spiritual lives.

Friends, in these days the imagined words of the Samaritan woman at the well ring as true life and reality for us. We have abilities that we cannot use and dreams we cannot fulfill as we live in the vulnerable time of Covid 19, the Corona virus. With news reports of rapidly expanding outbreaks and quarantines, limited testing abilities, no vaccine, no known treatments or preventions, the closing of schools and communities, canceled flights and cruises, hypervigilance, the shortages of hand sanitizer and toilet paper, we too find that we have little control over our own lives and bodies. We resent the presence of this stranger, this enemy in our midst, that has left us worried, concerned, anxious and isolated when we most crave and need connection with one another. We struggle to control what is beyond our control in this foreign situation.

We gather at the online and TV wells for news, for gossip, for updates, for education. We check the top five sources for information: the state, the Red Cross, the CDC, the UCC and the major networks, yet also rely on those we live with.

We meet Jesus at our well where he offers us living water, seeing into our hearts and souls with the fears, anxieties and stresses we bear in the midst of something we don't understand, something we have no idea how long this will be a part of our lives, or have any idea how different our lives may be when this is eventually history.

We thirst for meaning, for reassurance, for hope, for encouragement, for answers, for relief, for calm, for an end to this, for a cure, for prevention, for life to again be normal.

How then might our thirst invite us to open more deeply to God? Jesus crosses boundaries and barriers to be with us in the midst of these times, offering us all living water and a place to turn. He has stepped with us into a brand-new world that has contrasted all that we had known.

As we gather at the well with Jesus the boundary breaker who offers living water that we may never thirst again, let us be encouraged to see this time as not just crisis and chaos, but as compassion and connectedness in new ways. As we wait on the sidelines for our delayed activities and events to resume, for our abilities to again be used and our dreams fulfilled, let us help to satisfy the hunger of those in low-paying jobs who are not able to work right now because their company is shut down, or the children who do not have enough to eat because their school is closed, or those who would benefit from a phone call as they are isolated from visitors. Let the healing streams abound.

I pray that through this journey we all find the hope, peace and encouragement we need for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for all of God's beloved children, that we may rest in the image of living water that none of us may again be so thirsty. Amen.