

### **“Jesus Gives Living Water for a Thirsty Soul”**

I brought along with me today several items that I use on a regular basis. It is quite possible you’ve seen me before making use of one or more of these. I have my University of Arizona tumbler. Here’s my ACSTO cup. I have a water bottle that I use a little less frequently, but it sometimes comes in handy. And lastly, I have a Styrofoam cup. If you see me using one of these items, there is an extremely high likelihood that inside of that vessel is water. Having now lived in Arizona for nearly 12 years, I try to make sure that most places I go, I have water with me. You are probably well aware that here we are in a desert where things are dry and often hot, and if you don’t have enough water, that causes problems. Water is essential for life. It is necessary. And so, we make sure to drink it.

Our sermon text today, the account from John’s Gospel, tells us about an incident involving water in another dry and arid region. Through this account, though, we don’t learn about the importance of H<sub>2</sub>O or drinking water. We learn about a different kind of water, the Living Water that Jesus gives to thirsting souls. It, too, is essential. It, too, is available to us abundantly.

Let’s go with Jesus to that other arid region, across the globe. Recall with me that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not far from the capital city of Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish worship life. That’s where the Temple was. But Jesus’ earthly parents were from Galilee, a region to the North of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Those towns were in the region of Judea. Jesus did much teaching and preaching both in Galilee to the North and in Judea to the South, most notably in Jerusalem. And of course, in some cases he needed to travel in between.

In between these two regions lay Samaria. The inhabitants of Samaria, the Samaritans, were sort of a mixture. They had some Jewish ancestry, but it was mixed with a good deal of foreign lineage. Their religion was also a mix. They knew of and even cherished the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses. But they incorporated pagan worship practices in to their religion from a variety of backgrounds and sources. Between Jews and Samaritans, therefore, there was a mutual distaste. So much so that for most Jews who wanted to make the trip from Judea to Galilee or from Galilee to Judea, they would make their way all the way around Samaria instead of even walking through that region.

Not so with Jesus at least on this occasion. Heading from Judea toward Galilee, he and his disciples with him took the short route, which cut right through Samaria. At some point in their journey, Jesus stopped for a rest near a well. His disciples likely went to see about finding some food, and Jesus sat down to rest.

The short version of what happened next is that Jesus asked a woman for some water. But as you heard, the situation was much more complicated than that. This meeting at the well became an opportunity for Jesus to give and to teach about living water. Jesus did in fact ask this woman for a drink. And she was shocked. It was unusual enough for a Jew to travel through this area, much less to speak to a Samaritan, much less to speak to a Samaritan woman. But Jesus did. And he had a great deal to say.

Jesus said that the situation should have been reversed. The woman should have been asking Jesus for water, for living water. This certainly surprised the woman. She had a bucket for dipping water out of the deep well. The traveler did not, so there was no apparent way that he could provide water. It was all very confusing.

And Jesus didn’t exactly clear up the confusion when he said that the water he would give was better than that other water because those who have this water will never thirst again. But once the woman came to understand what Jesus was talking about, she would know how true his statement was. At the very least, she was intrigued. “Give me some of this water,” she said, “so that I won’t have to keep coming back to draw water from the well.”

And Jesus answered her request, just not in the way that she expected. She was still thinking about physical water. She was still thinking about wells and cups and buckets. Jesus was talking about spiritual matters. He was talking about the spiritual life that wells up in a person through faith and results in an eternal relationship with God. So to make this connection, to teach this woman about spiritual matters, Jesus gave her what at first glance seemed to be a simple command. "Go, get your husband."

But it wasn't so simple, was it? This woman didn't have a husband. She had lived a life seeking after comfort or security or whatever it was in particular for her. Her search had led her through five husbands. And she was still searching. At that stage of her life, she was with a man who was not her husband. With him she was seeking to satisfy her own pleasures and needs. "I have no husband," she confessed. And it was a confession. Jesus had just pointed out to her one area of her life in which it was clear that what she was doing didn't match up with what she was supposed to be doing. He was trying to teach this woman how thirsty she really was for spiritual drink, how much she needed the living water that he was offering. Jesus knew she had already had five husbands. He knew she was with another man who was not her husband. And how cut to the heart she must have been to realize that he knew all these things about her!

Up to this point, we've kind of been sitting on the sidelines. We've been watching this exchange. Now it is time to put yourself in the story. Instead of a well, let's use the church pew that you are sitting in right now. Jesus is passing through, and he sits down next to you. Just for a moment, ignore all the people who are sitting around you now. It is you and Jesus. And he wants to make sure that you understand how much you need what he has to offer. What does he ask you?

He asked the woman at the well, "Go get your husband." Does he ask the same of you? Does he point out that you have decided to live in a way that doesn't reflect his plan for love and marriage? Or does he ask something else? Does he ask you to share with him how much is in your offering envelope? Does he take that angle in order to force you to consider how it honors him or doesn't when you determine what to place in the plate or to give through automatic means? Does he say, "Go get your family budget, and let's look at what it says about your priorities"? Does Jesus say, "Show me how you treat your brother or your sister"? Have you figured out what it is—that one question that would most quickly cut to the heart of the matter and show most clearly your need for a Savior? The fact is that most of us would be forced to admit that there are any number of questions Jesus could ask that would reveal our sinful shortcomings.

And Jesus doesn't even need to ask. Just like he already knew the woman's background when he met her at the well, he knows you and he knows me. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows every challenge and every failure and every disappointment. He knows that on our own we are completely empty. And he wants us to thirst for something more and something better. It's not something that we can work harder to find. It's something that he gives. It is living water.

We have to watch again at the well for just a few moments as Jesus gives it to the Samaritan woman. She is so surprised by his answer that she says, "clearly you are a prophet." "There is something special about you. So tell me what I should do. Do I worship here at Mount Gerizim like my ancestors have, or do I need to worship in Jerusalem like the Jews say we should?" This thirsty heart needed answers. She needed to know what to do! But she didn't need to do anything.

"True worshipers worship in spirit and in truth." The place is not the most important thing. The Jews have a deeper knowledge because of what God has revealed to them and through them. But God is spirit. He isn't confined to a place. His worshipers are not confined to a location.

Then the woman explained her confidence. "The Messiah is coming. He will explain everything to us!"

And Jesus filled her thirsty heart with the best possible news. "He is here. I am the one you have been waiting for." The Jewish Messiah had revealed himself to the Samaritan woman. She had before her the one who would answer all of the questions he asked her. He would take her sinful lifestyle and nail it to

the cross. He would give her his perfect life as her own. He would fill her with living water. And that is exactly what he did.

And he has done the same for you and for me! Jesus gives living water to thirsting souls. In any place, like the surprising Samaria. Not confined to a building or a race or a people group. He died for the sins of the world and through his Word he calls all who hear.

And that living water comes only through him. So let us go to him. Let us seek him in his Word where he has promised to come to us. Let's find him in the sacraments that he has entrusted to us for our good. Let us worship him in spirit and truth. That means that we come to church not satisfied but thirsting. We worship not by simply going through motions here in a service, standing at the right times, sitting at the right times and saying the right things. No, but by living your life to honor the one who gave you life, the one who has poured out on you living water.

The text: John 4:5–26 (NIV84)

<sup>5</sup> So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

<sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup> 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.)

<sup>10</sup> 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."

<sup>11</sup> "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? <sup>12</sup> 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?"

<sup>13</sup> Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> 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."

<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

<sup>17</sup> "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup> 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."

<sup>19</sup> "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

<sup>21</sup> Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

<sup>25</sup> The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."