



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

Third Sunday of Lent

March 15, 2020

“Living Water”

(John 4:13-15)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Jesus answered, ‘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.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty . . .” (John 4:13-15).

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone....sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

One time, Jesus and his friends were traveling from Judea in the south back home to Galilee in the north. John writes, “He had to go through Samaria.” The necessity lies in mission, not geography. Normally, Jews went around Samaria, even though it added miles. But Jesus has something in mind, so here they are, Jesus and the 12, in Samaria. They’ve been walking for hours when they arrive at a well. It’s midday and hot. They’re hungry, thirsty and tired. Jesus sits by the well, while his disciples go into town to buy some food. A woman approaches.

Now this is interesting and uncomfortable. In the first place, she is a Samaritan, and for something like 700 years there had been a festering and hostile division between the Jews of Judea and their second cousins, the Samaritans. It has to do with which temple was the real one and whose laws were the real deal, and who was pure and who was impure. Jews and Samaritans pretty much hated each other and for centuries had cultivated this hatred. So here he is, a young Jewish rabbi, sitting at a well in Samaria. A Samaritan is coming toward him. It’s time for him to get up and create some distance, to avoid any kind of interaction or confrontation. But he doesn’t. He doesn’t budge.

Furthermore, it’s not any old Samaritan. It’s a woman. And the law is clear. Males, especially rabbis, should not have anything to do with women in public, other than their wives. It’s time for Jesus to get out of there.

Instead he actually asks her for a drink of water. She objects. “You know better than that. You’re a Jew and I’m a Samaritan.” You see, if he used a drinking vessel handled by a Samaritan he would become unclean because all Samaritans are “unclean,” because all Samaritans are unclean, you know.

Jesus answers, “If you knew the gift of God” (the Greek word there for gift emphasizes God’s grace, without payment, gratis) . . . “If you knew the *gift* of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him [for a drink] and he would have given you living water. . . The water I give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The expression “welling up” is a vigorous one, more like leaping up. Vigorous, abundant,

energetic eternal life.

She doesn't understand. "Sir, give me this water so I don't have to keep coming here to lug this water back to town."

Then the conversation takes a turn. We're about to find out something about her that makes it all the more urgent that Jesus get out of there as quickly as possible. "Go bring your husband," he says. "I have no husband," she responds. "You're right," Jesus observes. "You've had five and the man you're living with now is not your husband." Notice, he doesn't spare her the uncomfortable truth. There's Law in this truth. But there's also love. He speaks the truth in love.

In any case, now the encounter is way out of bounds. She's a sinner, and an outcast among her own people. That's probably why she is coming to the well in the heat of the day instead of the cooler, evening hours when women usually went to the well.

Wooden buckets are heavy; water is also heavy. Carrying it is hard work made harder by the other burdens she carries . . . the men she's known, or rather the men who have known her, used her, and then discarded her. The man she's now living with has not even given her the honor of being called her husband. He's just one more guy in a line of men who is taking advantage of her and will probably leave her. She comes to the well to collect water, but what she needs is forgiveness and hope and someone to heal her sin sick soul.

But how does one do that? How do you even get to the soul to heal it? The body can be healed. A surgeon can cut into your chest cavity and actually work on your beating heart. But your soul . . . it cannot be seen. It cannot be touched or examined on the operating table. However, you do have a soul and it does get injured and damaged. It feels the abuse that ends one's childhood too early. And the miscarriage that abruptly ends one's parenting. And the marriage, that began with such high hopes, but ended in a heartbreaking and contentious divorce. It feels the vacuum inside when your spouse dies. These things cut deeper than a surgeon's scalpel. They cut into your soul. So this woman is not the only one whose soul is bruised and bleeding. We are all damaged, and it shows up in middle of the night restlessness. Or it could be on the way home from work as you worry about your fractured family, or a teenage child who keeps making poor decisions, or a young child who has a hard time keeping friends. Yes, we all have souls that are bruised and bleeding. To you Jesus

comes, just as he had to see this woman. Remember, “He had to go through Samaria.”

Their conversation continues. She holds her own. She’s not intimidated by him, and he isn’t afraid of her. Most important of all, he has not rejected her. She is guilty of flagrant immorality; everybody knows it. She carries an enormous stigma in town and has come to terms with universal rejection. But here is a man who doesn’t react to her as men in her village always do: as a potential sexual partner, or as a social outcast unfit to be seen with. This man has neither tried to seduce her nor condemn her. He has talked with her. Spoken truth to her and accepted her. It startles her. First, he *asks* for water from her, but then he *offers* her water. Living water. It doesn’t come from any well. It comes from him. He is the source of all living water. His life, death, resurrection and forgiveness are a life-giving gush of water.

Remember how from on the cross Jesus cried out “I thirst.” Roles are reversed. On the cross, Jesus becomes the thirsty one. He becomes the one longing for life. He becomes the one stigmatized with sin. He becomes the one whose soul is bruised and bleeding. Bearing the heavy weight of sin and shame, he is pulled down into the pains of hell and dies in our place that he might rise and offer his eternal, life-giving water.

Jesus, who sat by the well, came to be this woman’s Savior, and yours. For once in her life, this woman meets a man who gives rather than takes. And what he gives makes her a child of God, loved of God, not hated. Forgiven, not condemned. Treasured, not rejected.

Just then, the disciples return and are horrified. Thankfully, they hold their tongues. Good for them! They don’t chastise her or question him as to why he’s speaking with her. Maybe they’re starting to understand. Maybe in this scene they could see the great lesson Jesus was teaching and living, that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” She had had five husbands, and after that simply stopped trying even to *appear* respectable. Yet still, he does not revile her. He did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world.

What happens next is amazing. This woman becomes an evangelist. She might not be able to preach in the synagogue, but that doesn’t stop her from bearing eloquent testimony to Jesus Christ. She runs to the village, to tell anyone who will listen

about this amazing man who knew everything about her yet didn't reject her. She asks, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" – a suggestion, really, which she wisely frames as a question.

And the most amazing thing of all? Verse 39: "Many of the Samaritans of that town believed because of the woman's testimony." Not only did they believe, but the people of that village, those Samaritans invited that little band of Jews to do the unthinkable and stay with them, and the rabbi accepted the invitation.

For the 12, and for that village, I suspect nothing like this had ever happened before. They were ancient enemies, people who believed in the very depths of their hearts that the others were so wrong and inferior and heretical and inherently dangerous. Yet because of Jesus, they spent two days together. They must have eaten together. I'll bet they had a banquet and drank a little wine, using Samaritan cups and bowls. They must have slept under the same roofs. And I suspect before they parted ways they even embraced. And I think all of this, from saving this woman and incubating new faith among the Samaritans and breaking down old barriers . . . I think this is why John says, "He had to go through Samaria."

This is a new way of thinking and being, a way that will take its risks on the side of acceptance, not rejection; love, not hatred; redemption, not condemnation. Jesus asked this woman for a drink to quench his thirst and ended up quenching hers with "living water" which is his forgiveness and salvation.

Each of us thirsts for that. No matter who we are, we want to know God doesn't hate us but loves us, hasn't come to condemn us but to save us. And I'm here to tell you he has. Christ shed his blood for you, whoever you are. Like the woman at the well, he knows everything you've done, but does not reject you.

In a sense, Jesus is still sitting there at Jacob's well, waiting for you to come with your bruised and bleeding soul and your empty bucket. And he has water to give, a water welling up to eternal life. This water is found right here, in these means of grace, where he quietly gives us his forgiveness and salvation.

One time, long ago, a woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water" and that is what he did. He did not condemn her. He loved her. He forgave her and invited her into his amazing kingdom of grace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

