

The 3rd Sunday in Lent

Text: John 4:5-30, 39-42 (ESV)

⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

²⁷Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³⁹Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They 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 indeed the Savior of the world."

Theme: Living Water for the Thirsty

This is perhaps one of the most fascinating stories in the Gospels. It deals with a woman who was an outcast on many fronts, but not with Jesus. Verse 4, the verse just before our text is important. It says, "*Jesus had to go through Samaria.*" In Greek that verse begins with a short, three letter

word, “dei,” which means, “it is necessary.” At this time Jesus was traveling from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. Samaria was in the middle. You might think that it sounds logical that Jesus would have to travel through Samaria. It would be like traveling through Racine county to get to Kenosha. However, Jews never went that way. They took a round-about way on the other side of the Jordan River. It would be like going to Kenosha through Waukesha and Lake Geneva. They despised the Samaritans so much that they would rather walked many miles out of the way than enter their territory. Jesus could have traveled the usual route that Jews took, but He had to go through Samaria because He had to be living water for this thirsty woman.

I. He was living water for the woman at the well.

She was rejected by everyone. As I said earlier, the Jews despised the Samaritans. When the Assyrians conquered the 10 northern tribes other nations were brought in who intermarried with the Jews who were left there. They Samaritans were looked at as half-breeds. They also had a history of idolatry, and their place of worship was not Jerusalem, but Mt. Gerazim. (This was an important place in the Old Testament. It was where Abraham first landed in the promised land (Dt 11:29, and where Joshua renewed the covenant. (Jos 8:33) She was surprised that Jesus, a Jew, would even talk to a Samaritan. Most Jews would have rather gone thirsty than ask her for a drink.

She was also despised by her own people. It’s significant that she came to the well at noon. People didn’t have running water at that time. The women went to wells to draw water and carry it home. Getting water was a social event. The women and their children would come to the well in the morning and the evening when it was cool. There would be some gossip and other stories. The children would play. But this woman was not or didn’t feel welcome at such times. She came when no one else was around.

She had also been despised by many men. Jesus reveals that she has had 5 husbands and that the man she was living with was not her husband. I once thought that Jesus was revealing her sin, but I believe that Jesus was revealing that He knew her plight. In that society a man could divorce his wife for any reason, even if he didn’t like her cooking. But there was a double-standard. A woman could not divorce her husband, even if he was unfaithful to her. In that culture five husbands meant that five men had said to her, “I don’t want you as my wife any longer,” and sent her away. To make matters worse, the man she was now with did not even give her the dignity of a wedding ring. Without a legal marriage, she had none of the legal protection of a marriage. He wanted the benefits of having a woman without the responsibility of having a wife.

She was even despised by Jesus’ disciples. When they returned from grocery shopping, they were shocked to see Jesus speaking with this woman. They all wanted to say something to Jesus about it, but they were afraid to. In that culture it was shameful for a man to speak with a woman in public, even if she was his wife. The disciples would have like to have shooed her away. This was a woman who was despised and rejected.

Jesus went through Samaria especially for her. She was the reason He had to go through Samaria. When He came near Sychar, Jesus sent His disciples into town to buy food. He sat down by the well, knowing that she was about to come. When the woman arrived, He asked her for a drink. That simple request surprised her, because Jews never spoke with Samaritans. Then they entered into a

lengthy conversation in which Jesus revealed that He knew everything about her. He ended up revealing to her that He is the Messiah. Generally, He kept that a secret, but He offered her living water, which was His forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. That woman had been despised and rejected all of her life, but Jesus had to go to Samaria to meet with her. She meant nothing to everyone else in the world, but Jesus loved her and brought her salvation that day. He began by asking her for a drink, but what He really wanted was that this poor woman would drink from Him, the living water.

II. This story has an interesting parallel to Good Friday.

That little Greek word “dei” which means “It is necessary” occurs dozens of times in the Gospels. Almost every times it means that it was necessary that Jesus would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die for us. For instance, Jesus says in Matthew 16:21, *“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that **it was necessary** that He go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and that He must be killed and on the 3rd day be raised to life.”* Another example is John 3:14,15, our Gospel lesson last week, where Jesus says, *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so **it is necessary** that the Son of Man is lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.”* Just as Jesus had to go to Samaria to meet this woman, He had to go to Calvary to save us all. He began His conversation with the woman with the words, “Will you give me a drink?” While He was on the cross, He said to the soldiers, “I thirst.” After He caught the woman’s interest, He revealed to her that He is the Messiah. After Jesus received the drink from the soldiers, He told them, *“It is finished.”* Then He died. In each of these cases Jesus asked for a drink, but behind it was a bigger plea, that they would drink from Him, the living water.

II. He is living water for each one of us too.

Like that woman, we all hunger and thirst for righteousness. There are times when we have been despised and rejected like that woman. We have been outcasts, even among our own people. Other people have made us feel worthless and dirty. We thirst for someone who will treat us with dignity. At other times, it is our own sins that parch us. We live in guilt because of the things that we have done. Sometimes we live in fear. The greatest of those fears is death. We might even feel and undeserving of any goodness like this woman did. She was surprised that Jesus would even say a word to her.

In the midst of our despair, Jesus comes with words that refresh, *“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* (Mt 11:28) Psalm 27:10 says, *“Though father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”* In Romans 8 Paul writes, *“If God is for us who can be against us?”* In Is 43:1 we have the promise, *“I have called you by name. You are mine.”* God searches for us, and He reminds us that He loves us, forgives us, and will give us eternal life. He will never leave us or forsake us. He might not sit down at a well with us; however, He sends one of His people to us. They might not have known it, but it was necessary that day that they come and speak words that refreshed us in Christ. Look back at your life. Can you remember someone whom God sent at just the right time who spoke the words that you needed to hear? They reminded us of God’s love and their love for us in Christ.

God uses each of us in the same way. The Samaritan woman went back to her village. She told them

about Jesus. They had to come and see Him. They all confessed, *"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."* She became a well of living water for them as she shared Christ with them. God has used us all in that same way. At some time, maybe even when you didn't know it, God knew that it was necessary that you go someplace. Someone needed those words of refreshment that you could give them in Christ. God made you into a living well for someone who was spiritually parched.

Jesus asked the woman at the well for a drink. In reality, it was she who needed a drink. She was parched spiritually and needed Him, the Living Water. God has His eye is on us too. He comes to us with His words and through His Supper and reminds us, *"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."* May He always refresh us with those words of the Gospel, words that are spirit and life.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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