

## The Third Sunday of Lent

### Text: John 4:4-30, 39-42

<sup>4</sup>Now he had to go through Samaria. <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." <sup>27</sup>Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" <sup>28</sup>Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup>"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" <sup>30</sup>They came out of the town and made their way toward him. <sup>31</sup>Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." <sup>32</sup>But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." <sup>33</sup>Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" <sup>34</sup>"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. <sup>35</sup>Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. <sup>36</sup>Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. <sup>37</sup>Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." <sup>39</sup>Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. <sup>41</sup>And because of his words many more became believers. <sup>42</sup>They said to the woman, "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." (NIV)

### *Living Water for the Thirsty*

I find this story to be one of the most fascinating in the Gospels. It like a treasure chest that is full of revelations about the love of our Savior. This time I noticed something special in verse 4, which precedes our text. 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 had been 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 Gerazim. 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 interesting when Jesus came to the well. It was about noon. People didn’t have running water at that time. They had to come and draw it from wells. It was a woman’s work to get water. 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 have thought that Jesus was revealing her sin, but I have come to wonder whether Jesus might have revealed 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 their grocery shopping trip, 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 is 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. To everyone else in the world, she was nobody, 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 3<sup>rd</sup> day be raised to life.*” Another example is John 3:14,15 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, “Fear not, for I am with you;” I forgive you all of your sins.” Psalm 27:10 even says, *“Though father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”* God searches for us, and He reminds us that He loves us, forgives us, and will give us eternal life. 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 that 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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[www.benediction-lcms.org](http://www.benediction-lcms.org)***