

Sermon Reading: John 4:5-26 (*much of the reading is quoted in the sermon*)

It was just another ordinary day. Walking from her home in a nearby city she takes her daily trek down to the well to draw water to take home. Lugging the heavy jug she goes, alone. While maybe out of the ordinary for others, she might have been used to it by now. With her complicated past and her current situation, it wasn't too much of a surprise if the other women tried to avoid her. It was about noon when she arrives at Jacob's Well when things start to get interesting. There's a man obviously tired, resting, sitting by the well. And this man, surprisingly, starts up a conversation with her. Usually men didn't do this—speak to women in public like that. What he asks isn't too much out of the ordinary; after all, he was a tired-out traveler. She hears him say, **“Will you give me a drink?”** (v.7).

But this surprises her. You see, not only was she a woman, but she was also a Samaritan. This man was clearly a Jew. It was well known that the Jews and Samaritans did their best to avoid interactions with each other. The Jews saw the Samaritans as mixed-breed outsiders who had polluted not only the line of Abraham but also the worship of the one true Lord. The Samaritans see the Jews as stuck up who thought they were better than everyone else. This is a gross oversimplification of over 400 years of animosity between these two groups of people. Suffice it to say, they hated each other. She asks the stranger, **“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”** (v.9). To which the stranger responds, **“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”** (v.10).

Before he had her curiosity, now her curiosity is piqued. He clearly doesn't have a vessel or anything to use draw water from this deep well; otherwise, why would have asked for help in the first place? So, how could he offer her something like this? Does he really think he is better than her forefather Jacob? You would think it is clear that this stranger is talking about something more; but she doesn't know. She doesn't know the man. She doesn't know the gift. She doesn't know what this man is offering to her.

The stranger continues, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”** (v.13). What he says sounds too good to be true. If what he offers is real, then she wouldn't have to be lugging this big jar, drawing up water, all alone, every day. **“Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty”** (v.14).

Do you know God's gift and what he offers to you? This Samaritan woman is thirsty—thirsty for literal water, but also so much more. She's thirsty for a less

complicated life. She's thirsty for companionship. She's thirsty to know that what she is doing is "the right thing." What about you? What are you thirsty for? Maybe you could use something to soothe a dry throat or parched tongue. But, like the Samaritan woman, you probably are thirsty for much more. We too thirst for a certain life—the frustrations to go away, the disappointments to never come, the rest from stress and peace of mind to be present. We thirst for change—change our life dreams and goals to be realities, change from the monotony and daily grind. We thirst for more—not too much lest we be greedy—but just a little more—more time, more money, more things, more talents. We too thirst for companionship—someone to be by our side, to be there, to be heard, to be supported. We thirst to be seen—our struggles validated, our thoughts heard, our feelings recognized. We thirst for security, stability, and sustainability. We thirst for answers to what the future holds while thirsting for knowledge that we are doing "the right thing." If we were to ask everyone here what they are thirsty for, you'd probably find 1) someone else who is thirsty for the same thing and 2) a lot of other ideas too. Like the Samaritan woman, we like to think that once we have those thirsts quenched, God give us these things, that's what we need, we will be satisfied and okay. But would we?

But you need so much more. The Samaritan woman did too. The stranger continues: **"Go bring your husband."** All of a sudden, the once talkative woman has very little to say. **"I have no husband,"** she claims. To which the stranger responds, **"You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ 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."**

Who does that? How could he bring up an obvious sore spot from her past? Whatever the circumstances were that led to having five husbands in the past we don't know. But by the way she reacts, it's not too much of a jump to conclude that something is not right here and she knows it too. Then there's the fact the man she is living with is not her husband and, evidently, they were acting as if they were husband and wife. She knew she was breaking God's Law—the Samaritans held tightly to it. Now this stranger pokes the sore spot that very likely caused her some great troubles in her life. It's a spot where she must admit that she has not lived up to God's demands; a spot where her own conscience condemns her.

Imagine yourself in her position. Which of your sins would be called out onto the table? Which of your sins of your own past and present failures would you be told to go and bring back? What sin that you are ashamed of and embarrassed to admit you have done or currently wrestling with? Which sin that you tell yourself isn't that bad and people should just learn to get over it, but deep down you still know

what you are doing is wrong? Which sin that you expertly cover up with well-rehearsed excuses to help you sleep at night? What is it that you know that you should be doing but do not do and the wrong you do not want to do but keep on doing?

Like we so often do when we are confronted with our sin, the Samaritan woman quickly changes the subject. At the same time though, you can tell she wants to do “the right thing.” We want to believe that we can achieve the “right thing” and do it. She wants to know how. She recognizes this stranger is more than that. She calls him a prophet and asks questions about worship. The Samaritans say you can worship God *this way* but the Jews say we must worship that way. But she doesn’t know! The Samaritans were trying. They care about prophets, about Moses, God, Messiah, and worship. They were trying to do “the right thing.” But they didn’t know. And so, they had no peace with God. They were thirsty and didn’t know what they needed to quench that thirst.

That’s us too, isn’t it? You are trying. We want to do “the right thing.” You care about God, worship, his Word; that’s why you are here. But then you maybe find yourself running back to the same well, or trying to find another well, that will quench your thirst because you struggle to know God’s gift. We get so busy, so tied up, we even know what we should be doing, but even then, it comes back to you doing something in order to quench that thirst.

But this isn’t something you can do for yourself. It must be given to you. That’s when the stranger quenches her thirsty soul: “I Am! The one speaking to you.” To this woman, an outsider, an outcast, a non-Jew, Jesus reveals “I am the one God had promised. I am the one who quenches the deep thirst you have. I am!” And now she knows! And when she goes back to bring the people who live in her town so they too will know because they will hear his Word that this Jesus is the Savior of the world.

While we live in this world we continue to thirst for so much. God’s people continue to suffer. We live in a world with complicated lives, broken relationships, unfulfilled dreams, people who hurt us, and us who often hurt ourselves. And into this Jesus brings us hope. For us whose sins we try so hard to hide but could not from the all-knowing God. For us who want to do the “right thing” but come up short, often miss, and too frequently our good intentions fail. We were still powerless! But Jesus doesn’t wait for you to get better; he knew you wouldn’t. He doesn’t wait to do something until you to choose him; he knew we couldn’t. He knew the struggle was real and no amount of effort, trying, promising was going to lead you out. So, Christ died for the ungodly. Unheard of! But God doesn’t just say he loves you, he shows his love for us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for

us. He took your place. He suffered your sins. He endured the punishment you deserve. That cross should have been my own and the flames of hell my home; instead, Christ died for me. He died for you. It is finished. You are justified—that means, God declares you not guilty of your sin. Not because of anything you have done, are doing, or would do in the future. No, by faith you are justified. The waters of Holy Baptism killed us and we rose with our living Savior Jesus who gives us life! Life with him who will never leave you. No more huffing and puffing trying to do the right thing. You have peace with God. You are right with him, for Jesus' sake who died for us. You have a new life, without the guilt of sin—you are justified. It's yours, by faith, which God creates and gives to you today. Life promised for eternity in the home he has prepared for you.

Now we have hope that will not put us to shame because this same Jesus who died has risen to live again. Like with the Samaritan woman, Jesus came to you, personally. For all intents and purposes, it was an ordinary day. But not for you. No, he came to you as a gift: life-giving water in the baptismal font brings you into God's family. And from that day forward, your life was changed. You were changed. You are God's child who he gives every good thing! And he continues to come to you on what most would say are ordinary days. But here he is. Here's the gift: himself, there in the bread and wine, his body that felt the thirst just like you and his blood that was poured out just for you. Take and eat, take and drink Christ who died for sinners of whom I am the worst is for you. Here's the gift: the life-giving water of his Word that assures you as we thirst for so much his love is sufficient for you as he provides all you need for body and life. And grace upon grace, he gives himself to us through each other as he fulfills our needs and quenches our thirst through the love and service of one another. See the opportunities on otherwise ordinary days. Know the gift and share that life-giving Jesus. Amen.