

LIVING WATER

John 4:5-30, 39-42

Third Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 12, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 4, verses 5 through 30 and 39 through 42. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 4, beginning at verse 5, we read in Jesus' name.

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

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The 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.) ¹⁰ Jesus 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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

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

²⁷ Just 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?" ²⁸ So 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?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

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

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus' great desire is to forgive. Before we even confess our sins, he has resolved to forgive us. We see this over and over again in the Scriptures. We see it on multiple occasions in Jesus' ministry. And I know we've talked about it here before. I feel like I've talked about it quite a bit. And every time we prepare for confession, we are reminded that God is committed to forgive us before we even confess. We often hear the promise, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

There are certain parts of our liturgy that get repeated ... a lot. And I know there's a danger with these things that they might just become rote repetition. But the upside outweighs the danger. The upside is that these things would become so deeply imprinted on our minds that they would become a way of life. So when you feel that something is becoming mere repetition, do not despise the thing. Cherish it. Meditate on it. Think about it. Look and see if it says something that you've never given much thought to before. I can almost guarantee that there's something in our often-repeated words that you've never noticed before.

So there are certain things that get repeated a lot. And this is one of those things. Jesus is committed to forgive your sins before you even confess. This is one of those often-repeated things. First, because it's true. Second, because we see it demonstrated over and over again in the Bible. And third, because we forget it. This is so easy to forget. We drift back into fear and shame.

We know we need to confess our sin, but we might think, *Not quite yet. Maybe I can be good for a little while first.* We know we have some stuff to deal with, but we feel like it will be less painful if we can at least make a start at improvement without God's help and without having to let him know about it. But, of course, he already knows it. And he comes to us and finds us when we don't want to be found. But he often makes it less painful than what we expect.

We see this in the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus.

Jesus was going home from Judea to Galilee, and passing through Samaria was the shortest route, but Jews typically walked around Samaria. It was considered something of enemy territory for them.

There had been rivalry between Jews and Samaritans for centuries. If we go back about a thousand years before the time of Jesus, we see that Jews and Samaritans are related. But there was a civil war, followed by other wars and events and intermarrying with foreign nations that caused deeper and deeper division between Jews and Samaritans. They shared much of the same religious history from the Old Testament. But they despised each other, while each claimed to be the true worshippers Yahweh.

So even though it might take a bit longer, Jews typically walked around Samaria. But Jesus wanted to pass through Samaria, and it was for the sake of this woman.

He comes to this well and sits down, because he is exhausted from the journey (4:6). That's kind of a strange thing to read about our God, that he was exhausted from walking, but so it is. The disciples went into town to buy food (4:8), so Jesus is sitting here all by himself. He's just waiting for someone to come along and draw some water out of the well for him.

And here comes this woman in the middle of the day. And what does she see when she gets to the well? A strange man sitting there thirsty. Some of the more reputable women of the town would avoid being caught alone with a strange man and would have turned around. But this woman doesn't seem to care about that. So she approaches the well.

Then this strange man asks her for a drink. Somehow she can tell that he is a Jew instead of a Samaritan, so she says, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (4:10).

Now, at this point, that's about all the woman knows about Jesus. To her, he's a total stranger. And she has no idea that he knows everything there is to know about her.

Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, especially when it came to food and drink. Jews had very strict customs. Drinking from a Samaritan's water pot would have defiled a Jew, or so they thought. So the woman is surprised. This strange man must be extremely thirsty to ask for a drink from *her* water pot.

So she asks, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"

Then this strange, thirsty man says something that makes no sense: "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" (4:10).

Now this is strange. She's the one with the water pot. And the thirsty man tells her that she should ask him for water, and not just any water, but some kind of special "living water." That doesn't follow, so she tells him so. "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (4:11-12).

And Jesus basically says, "Yes." He says, "Everyone who drinks of this water," that is, the water from the well, "will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (4:13-14)

This sounds like some pretty special water. Not only will it satisfy you for the moment, but Jesus promises it will satisfy you for your entire life and beyond. "A spring of water welling up to eternal life."

At this point, I don't think the woman believes a single word Jesus is saying. For one thing, she's probably thinking, *If this water is so great, then why are you so thirsty?* Jesus just seems like some traveler who's become delusional from dehydration.

But she decides to play along. We don't know her tone, but I think she's just being sarcastic when she says, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water" (4:15).

But now comes the moment of truth. Is Jesus really greater than Jacob?

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." (4:16-18)

Now what do you say to that? Apparently this guy does know something. He's not just delusional from dehydration. He knows all about her. He knows the things she wished he didn't know. We don't know exactly what happened to her five previous husbands. It's conceivable that

they all died, but not very likely. It's more likely that she has gone from one bad marriage to another five times. And Jesus knows that her current relationship is sinful before she even marries the guy. This total stranger can see right through her. Talk about uncomfortable. Maybe she should run away from this uncomfortable situation.

But she doesn't. She seems intrigued now. If he knows all these things about her, then why did he even talk to her in the first place? And why did he ask *her* for a drink of water? Suddenly it seems so much more remarkable that Jesus is talking with this woman. Not only is he a Jew and she a Samaritan. But she is an *adulterous* Samaritan woman, and Jesus knew it the whole time. But it didn't scare him away. He knows all her dirt, and he still wants to talk to her. Jesus does not bring up her sin to shame her. She already has enough of that. He brings it up because her sin is a problem and he is the solution.

The woman doesn't quite know yet who Jesus is, but she's getting there, and Jesus certainly helps her get there.

But she understands, at least, that Jesus is a prophet, so she asks him a religious question. She asks him about the location of true worship. And I don't know why she asks about this. It seems like a strange transition. Maybe she just wants to change the subject. Or maybe, since she can see that Jesus is a Jewish prophet who apparently isn't hostile to Samaritans, she might be able to get a straight answer.

Jews believed that true worship took place in Jerusalem, on the mountain where the temple was built. But the Samaritans had a rival location. They believed that true worship occurred only on Mount Gerizim, in their territory. So which is it? Jesus seems to have some supernatural knowledge. Maybe he can tell her.

But Jesus says neither. He affirms that salvation comes from the Jews. After all, Jesus is a Jew. But if you are wondering about the location of worship, it's not in Jerusalem, and it's not on Mount Gerizim. **"The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth"** (4:23).

It seems that the woman isn't quite ready to accept this, so she says, "I know that Messiah," that is, the Christ, "is coming. When he comes, he will tell us all things" (4:25).

Then Jesus drops the biggest bombshell revelation on her. He identifies himself as that Messiah, and not merely the Messiah, but also the one true God. He says, and this is a literal translation, **"I AM, the one speaking to you"** (4:26). The English is a little clunky, and that's why most translations don't translate it this way. But the first words out of Jesus' mouth are, **"I AM."** The Greek is a bit clunky too, because Jesus goes out of his way to put these words together. And there's a reason for that.

If you remember your Old Testament history, you'll remember that the words *I AM* are the name God gives for himself in the Old Testament. The Hebrew is *Yahweh*, and it simply means, "I AM." So not only does Jesus identify himself as the Messiah, that is, the Anointed One who is sent by the Father. But he also identifies himself as the God of the Old Testament who spoke to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets.

So at the end of this conversation, Jesus reveals to this adulterous Samaritan woman exactly who he is. It turns out that he knew everything about her, and now she knows why. He is God.

And now it is even more remarkable that Jesus is talking with this woman. Not only is he a Jew and she a Samaritan. Beyond simply being a Samaritan woman, she is an *adulterous* Samaritan woman. And Jesus is not merely a Jew, he is the Jewish Messiah, who also happens to be the God of the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And he knew this woman before she was even born. He knew all of her sins. But these sins did not keep him away

from her. Quite the opposite. Her sins drew him to her, because these sins needed to be taken care of.

So this is not a case of a Jewish man mistakenly speaking to an adulterous Samaritan woman. It is a case of the eternal God in human flesh knowingly confronting his lost child and promising her eternal salvation.

And this is true worship. True worship consists of guilty sinners receiving forgiveness for Jesus' sake.

In the Old Testament, worship consisted of sacrifice. That was the central part of worship. The debate between Jews and Samaritans was about which mountain God accepted sacrifices from. But Jesus says neither. Those sacrifices never took away sin. They only looked forward to the one sacrifice that takes away sin for all time: the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. *So Jesus Christ is the only one who offers to God the worship he requires.* And through Jesus Christ, God accepts all kinds of sinners as righteous.

You and I have nothing to offer God but sin and guilt. It is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, who can offer the Father the righteousness he requires in true worship. Jesus has done this for you in his sacrificial death. It has been done once and for all. So now Christian worship does not consist of us offering sacrifices to God. That has already been done, and it can't be done again. So worship consists of us simply receiving forgiveness from him.

In Christian worship, we experience the same thing that adulterous Samaritan woman experienced. We come into the presence of someone who can see right through us. He sees our thoughts. He knows our sins. He sees our depravity. But he does not avoid us, or shun us, or even condemn us. We don't need to hide, because he comes to us in mercy. He seeks out his lost children in order to give us eternal salvation.

So Christian worship is simply this: depraved people receiving living water from the only person who truly knows us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.