

Give Me Water

March 12, 2023

John 4:5-30 and 39-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 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 have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 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 seeks such as these 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” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” ²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him...

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” 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 truly the Savior of the world.”



This week we focus on our thirst for God’s abundance in our lives. As we all thirst in different ways and for different things, the means by which we experience God’s abundance

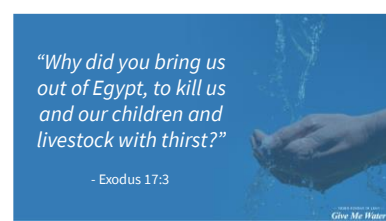
will be different for each of us. The Exodus story that we began our time together with is the story of physical thirst in the desert. They knew they needed water.

At times our thirst is physical. The story of the woman at the well is the story of relational thirst. She knew that she was living outside of that which she was so thirsty for – outside of community. We will also touch on the story of Mary and Martha. One is aware of her thirst for Jesus' words. The other is not aware, even though it is a deep need for her too. The same is true for the Israelites. The same is true for the woman at the well. The same is often true for us. We desperately need the word of God, yet we do not always recognize our need for the word, our thirst for God.

At times we find ourselves to be like the Israelites and like Mary, fully aware of our thirst. At other times we are like the woman at the well, sensing a need but not really knowing how to satisfy or maybe even identify our thirst. At times we are like Martha – too busy to notice that thirst that calls out to our soul. As we prepare to explore the thirsts revealed in these passages and to understand the thirsts that we and those around us have, let us begin with a word of prayer...

How many of you have been told by a doctor, by a PA, or by your spouse that you need to drink more water?... This is because there is ample medical evidence that the consumption of water is good for our health. Water is essential to life. It ranks right up there with air. And food. And shelter. In our part of the world, we are very aware of the impacts of droughts and of water shortages. So we can relate to the Israelites when they find themselves in the middle of the desert, without any water for themselves or for their livestock. It was a scary situation. Having water in the desert was a high-level concern for the nation of Israel. Turn with me to Exodus 17 as we look at the issues.

The Israelites have arrived at a place called “Rephidim.” It is a place without water. Soon panic sets in. As I read earlier, they quarrel with Moses, saying to him, “*Give us water to drink.*” Water is essential to all life. We know what it is like to be without water. Moses tries to calm them, reminding them that they aren’t just quarreling with him, but are actually testing God. Undeterred, the scene quickly escalates, with the people asking, “*Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?*” This is about the same thing as saying that Moses has led them out here just to kill them in the desert. Here we can see how quickly community and faith can erode when it feels like survival is at stake.



This is one of the lessons of this story. It is something for us to be aware of – in ourselves and in others. Another lesson that we learn here is that God is patient and tolerant. Moses turns to God in exasperation and says, “*What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.*” Moses is at his wit’s ends. God tells Moses to go on ahead of the people, taking with him some of the elders. God also tells Moses that God will go on ahead of Moses. He does not go alone. In verse 6 God says, “*I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.*” God first calls Moses to trust, to step forward in faith, believing that God is right there. God is there. Moses is instructed to strike the rock with his staff. Water gushes forth from the rock. As the people drink deeply of the water, Moses asks, “*Is the LORD among us or not?*” Moses understood that this was not just about survival. It was not just about satisfying their physical thirst. It was also about helping the people to recognize that God is always there, that God is where they should turn to first.



The lesson that God wants the people to learn is that God will provide. God provides not because of the need or because of the worthiness of the recipient. God provides because God is good and holy and just. This is a lesson that

we also must learn. Through time and experience, we learn to trust that God will provide. And there is a deeper, more personal lesson here too. We are called to represent God. How we respond to human need reflects not only our faith but also the God that we proclaim. We must ever keep in mind that our response is not just meeting a physical need, but in offering the grace and love of God as we meet that need. It's not just about sharing a meal or helping with a utility bill. It's also about helping another to experience Christ's love and grace through us. In this way, we are pointing to a greater need, to a deeper thirst in their lives. Often people who live with many needs in their lives do not readily recognize their need for God. It's hard to see this when one is in survival mode. Even more sadly, though, is the reality that we sometimes don't see our own thirst.

Maybe its as simple as forgetting that it is God provides. When we do this, we forget that we are called to be stewards of the blessings that God abundantly gives us. Or, because we can drink and drink, we forget that many cannot. We lose sight of that fact that we are all God's children. As we are all one, we are all thirsty.

Truth be told, my friends, we all have our thirsty days. Even Jesus had them. At times we will feel empty. At times we will feel lonely. We have days when we are thirsty, when we long to feel worthy, when we long to be a part of community.

Turn with me to John 4 as we spend some time with the woman at the well. She is one of many nameless women in the Bible. Yet here she is, in flesh and blood. And in this woman, we see one who Jesus came to save. She is like us – like you and like me. Here need is our need. Her thirst is our thirst. Her fears are our fears.



As our passage begins, we see that Jesus is in foreign territory. He is a Jew in the land of Samaria. He is at Jacob's well, just outside the town of Sychar. Once these were all

the same people. But during the exile, some Jews were left behind in Samaria. To survive, they intermarried with the locals. The Jews looked at the Samaritans as less than, as half-breeds. But the Samaritans traced their roots back to Jacob, one of the great patriarchs of the Jewish faith. They saw themselves as good as the Jews. At least as good as. So here we find Jesus in the land that almost all good Jews would walk well out of their way to avoid. As he rests beside the well at noon, in the heat of the day, a solitary woman comes to draw water.



Jesus speaks to her, to a woman, saying, "*Give me a drink.*" Here is where Jesus steps across the first barrier. Her first rebuff comes as she questions why a Jew would ever talk to

a Samaritan. She is used to putting people off. It is one of her defense mechanisms. Ignoring this second barrier, Jesus says, "If you only knew..." If you only knew who this was sitting here at the well and if you only knew that he could offer you the gift of living water... The woman continues her dismissal of Jesus. He has no bucket. The well is deep. Where do you even get this living water?

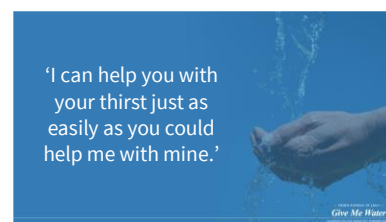
Returning to the theme of her first rebuff, she asks if he thinks he is better than her. Are you greater than Jacob, our ancestor?, she asks.

This woman is an outsider. She is coming in the heat of the day, all by herself. She has long grown tired of the other women questioning and condemning her lifestyle and the choices that she has made again and again. She is lonely. And now this stranger, this Jew, dares to ask something of her? Give me a drink?

What is radical here, scandalous even, is not that Jesus the Jew speaks to a Samaritan woman. What is radical, what is scandalous, is that he would want to love her. Wasn't this encounter just about getting a drink on a hot and thirsty day? There is no "just" with Jesus and there should be no "just" with us. Everything can be deeper than a chance encounter if we allow it to be. Everything can be an opportunity to connect, to share life, if we choose it. Every encounter we have with a stranger is with someone like this woman – a real person with a story we probably don't know, a real human being with a story we might never know, but can still honor them and their story if we choose to.

It can be so if we choose to see them as a person with a bucket and with needs. That's how Jesus saw this woman. He met her at the point of a common need – give me water. It is something we all need. This encounter was an invitation into conversation, into a relationship.

Jesus saw past a surface need and sought to minister to her deeper needs. She was obviously alone. But Jesus wanted to get deeper, to know her story, to hear her deepest needs. And Jesus invited her into the possibility of new life. In essence he said to this woman, 'I can help you with your thirst just as easily as you could help me with mine.' Jesus says this same thing to you and to me too.

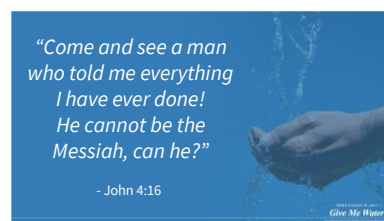


While we might know in our hearts that this is true, we can be skeptical in our minds. Maybe like the woman at the well, we say to Jesus, "You don't have a bucket." This problem, this trial, this struggle – you don't have a bucket for that one, Jesus. Or we say, the well is deep, Jesus. I'm beyond helping, Jesus. These just a couple of many ways of telling Jesus that he doesn't have what we need. Yes, you have words and great ideas. But what I really need, Jesus, is something that I can hold onto, something that I can put in my pocket or into my bank account. And besides, Jesus, what I really need is stuff that I can get with my own bucket.

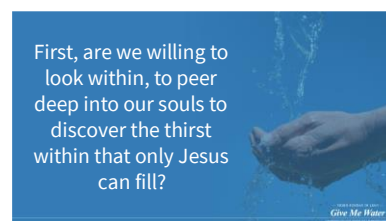
This is what the woman at well tried again and again. She has had husband after husband – five in all. None filled her, none brought her a relationship that she could count on, a life that she could find joy and peace and contentment within. So she got another. Except this wasn't #6. It was a boyfriend. Someone to fill her emptiness, someone to alleviate her loneliness. Yet she was still here at the well in the heat of the day, coming all alone to do a chore that is usually done in community.

For the woman, this next man in her life wasn't enough. The things of this world never are. Something inside of her knows this well enough to know that she wants this *"living water"* that Jesus offers. She didn't understand what he was offering, though. She just knew that there was something here that she wanted, something here that she needed. There was a whisper of hope. There was a possibility of connection. There was maybe some relief to the long-held pain. So she leaned in and stretched out her hand.

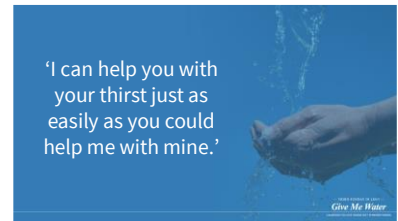
In verse 28 something amazing happens. Before she accepts this living water from Jesus, she leaves her water jar there and goes into town. Assured that what Jesus offers will always be there for her, she goes and says to the people: *"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"* She wants others to have what she knows is in her grasp. What great faith this is! Her question is not one of doubt, it is one of invitation. Come and see what I have found. Come and drink of this living water.



As we come near the close, two questions for us to take with us into the week ahead. First, are we willing to look within, to peer deep into our souls to discover the thirst within that only Jesus can fill? So, what do you thirst for? Is it for your family to know the Lord as you do? Is it for you to be a deeper part of the community of faith? Is it to find a place to belong (like woman at well)? Is it financial or relational stability or security? These are the hard questions of Lent.

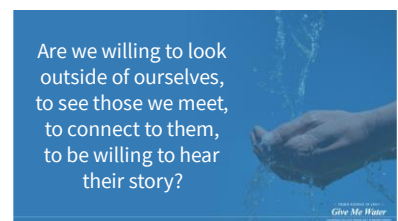


The second question connects into what Jesus says to us all: 'I can help you with your thirst just as easily as you could help me with mine.' When we give another a drink, it is as if we were giving to Jesus himself.



This is part of the story of Mary and Martha that we find in Luke 10. One sister is like the Israelites – she knew her thirst. The other sister was like the woman at the well initially was – she was distracted and did not know that she was thirsty. Mary sought what Jesus had to offer. Mary knew the gift that Jesus offered. She sat at Jesus' feet and received her soul food, like the woman at the well would do. Martha sought to be the giver, to offer food and hospitality to Jesus and his followers. She knew this was a need for Jesus and friends. It was something that she could offer. Martha did not quite know that she also needed the gift that Jesus offered. Later, when she was not so preoccupied, she would come to know the offer of life that Jesus gives, just like the woman at the well and the villagers that came to Jesus through her.

Here is the second question: Are we willing to look outside of ourselves, to see those we meet, to connect to them, to be willing to hear their story? Then we will enter into a relationship, into community. There we might discover a need for justice or for connection. There we might learn of a need for water or for food or for shelter. People all around us are in need. They are tired or weak or lonely or sick. People all around us need to encounter the living water.





Return with me to the well. The woman has gone into town and invited all she could to come and see, to come and be filled. They came and they spent some time with Jesus. In verse 39 we read, “*Many Samaritans from that city*

believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” Later in the passage, as they get to spend time with Jesus, many more came to believe. This week, may you and I choose to spend some time with Jesus. May we allow him to search the corners of our heart, revealing what we thirst for. And may we also go forth, inviting others to come and see, to come and be filled. May we go forth in faith, allowing our lives to witness to the power of the living water, offering others a drink. Through our lives, may others say, “Give me a drink.” May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. What thirst is there deep within your soul, one that only Jesus can fill?
- 2) *Pray*. Looking outside of yourself, who might the Spirit be guiding you meet, to connect with, to hear their story?
- 3) *Study*. Read John 6:25-35. What draws the crowd back to Jesus? Instead of food that spoils, what does Jesus offer? What is the result of accepting this offer?