

**The Third Sunday in Lent, March 12, 2023**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

**A Thirsty Woman, a Well, and Jesus**

John 4:5–30, 39–42

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

*Eph 1:2*


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Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well: **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that’s saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would’ve asked Him, and He would’ve given you living water”** (v 10). Later she tells Him, **“I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He’ll tell us all things.”** Jesus said, **“I AM, the One who speaks to you”** (vv 25–26).

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Every day was the same. Shortly before noon *she* headed out of town in the direction of the well, the one they traced all the way back to Father Jacob. She went there alone, eyes lowered, empty water jar balanced on her head. And an hour later you’d see her trudging back through the dust—back to her old life—weighed down with that same jar, full now. Back to the shadow of five ex-husbands and the current man who wasn’t. A woman whose soul was like dust, the dust of death.

Today, as usual, you saw her leave, but an hour later instead of a slow trudge you see a little cloud kicked up by her heels as she comes bustling and panting back into town. Where’s her jar of water? What happened out at Jacob’s well? Clutching her sides, with a lovely little smile you’ve never seen before, she only says, **“Come, see a Man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ (v 29)?”**

## 3.

Come, see. She invites you out to the well. She invites you to meet a Man unlike any Man she’d ever known; to meet a Man she never expected to meet; to meet a Man she never dreamed would have anything to do with someone like her.

But . . . let’s go back to the beginning.

It was, as I said, about noon, hot and dusty under the Middle Eastern sun. That was always when she went to draw water. The other women, of course, went when the sun was lower—morning or evening—chattering away with little ones at their heels. She

kept to herself, partly out of shame, partly because they wouldn't give her the time of day if she asked. She didn't belong with them.

So she was surprised this time to find someone else out by the well. If it were possible, this Stranger looked even more weary and dirty than she did. By the looks of Him, He'd already traveled far that day. How far He still had to go, she didn't know, and she had no intention of asking. Better to mind your own business. Plus, she could see He wasn't one of them, a Samaritan. He was a Jew. And you know how well they mix—like oil and water. Jews viewed Samaritans as half-breeds with corrupted religious practices because their Israelite ancestors had intermarried with foreigners brought there after the Assyrian conquest. So she'd just fill her jar and be on her way.

**“Give Me a drink”** (v 7). Already anxious and on edge, His voice startled her. **“Give Me a drink.”** It wasn't harsh or rude. But, why would He . . . ? Everyone knew that Jews thought Samaritan women were unclean from birth. They wouldn't be caught dead touching the same cup, much less drinking from it. **How is it that You ask me for a drink** (v 9)? The nerve!

But then it took a strange turn. He didn't even seem to notice the whole Jew-and-Samaritan bit, almost as if seven hundred years of bad blood and religious differences were nothing to Him. His request for water had been a surprise. His next words were just plain confusing: **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that's saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would've asked Him, and He would've given you living water”** (v 10). What? Who is this guy? Where's His source of fresh, running water? What gift of God could He possibly be talking about? **“Why, you've got nothing to draw water and God knows how deep this well is. Where d'you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock”** (vv 11–12).

**“Ah, woman,”** He replied, **“everyone who drinks of this water from Jacob's well will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I'll give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I'll give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”** (vv 13–14). But she doesn't get it. She's still on the surface level, still thinking of earthly drinking water, even so—that would be great! Water that satisfies forever! Why, she'd never have to make that lonely, sweaty, dusty, trip out to the well again! **“Sir, You've made me thirsty just talking about it. Give me this water”** (v 15).

Honestly, she didn't have a clue how deep her thirst really was. I mean her spiritual thirst. She didn't realize how dry the well was, the well from which she'd been drawing all her life. She didn't know how bad the water was that she'd been drinking. Do you? What well are you drawing from? What kind of water does it hold? What's the deeper thirst that drives you to it? . . . Because I can guarantee that the Samaritan woman isn't the only one walking a lonely road with a soul as dry as dust, trying to quench her thirst in the same sad place day after day after day. Jacob's well just won't cut it.

And now she's been offered a **spring of water welling up to eternal life**, and she's not about to pass that by. What started with Him asking her for water leads to her asking Him for water! Now she wants what this Guy has. You should want it, too.

**"Go,"** He says, **"call your husband, and come here**, not to the well but to Me" (v 16). What? Is that a proposal? Because she's doesn't have a husband, not just now, but she'd be in the market for one. **"Well, I've got no husband"** (v 17), she says. He already knows. He knows just how great her thirst is: **"You're right . . . for you've had five husbands, and the one you now have isn't your husband. What you've said is true"** (vv 17–18). He knows. My God, He knows!

**He told me all I ever did.** She wasn't talking about the kinds of things you put on a college application or a resume. She didn't mean the carefully presented image you post on Facebook, Linked In, or whatever social media you happen to use. She meant her five husbands and current live-in. *All I ever did.* What a scary idea! To have everything I've ever done and been exposed, laid bare, known by someone else. Known by this Stranger at the well. What is it for you? What are the five husbands that haunt your life? What people, things, and situations would you prefer to keep hidden? What false beliefs have you mixed with the truth, and what strange gods have you worshiped? But He knows. That's why He said, **"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that's saying to you, 'Give Me a drink, you would've asked Him, and He would've given you living water.'**" He knows what you need—you thirsty Samaritans, dry as dust. He knows that you need Him and what's there in Him. You need the fountain that brings life and breath to the dust. Though you are returning to dust, He brings resurrection to new life.

### 1.

Only a prophet could know her sin like that. So, this man by the well must be a prophet. Maybe even something more than a prophet. He can tell her where to go for forgiveness, where to worship, whether on the Samaritan mountain or in Jerusalem with the Jews. **"Woman, believe Me,"** He says, **"the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.** He will be worshiped in

a new way. **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**" (v 21, 23). True worship isn't so much about a place as it is about a person—about Him. True worship is to worship in communion with this Man and the Holy Spirit whom He sends.

**The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He'll tell us all things." Jesus said, "I AM, the One who speaks to you"** (vv 25–26). Now she knows the gift of God. Now she knows who it was that said to her, "Give Me a drink." Now she knows the source of living water. And now you know, too. The gift of God is the Son whom the Father sent in love to be lifted high on the cross; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; the Bridegroom who has the bride.

Yet, He had asked her for a drink. That's why He met her at the well and meets you here today. What drink would He have? Not water from Jacob's well but sin, shame, and death, hers and yours, along with the very wrath of God. He will drink it all, even if leaves Him crying out in agony in the heat of the day, **"I thirst!"** (Jn 19:28). He will drink it, even if it kills Him and blood and water come streaming out of His side. Truly, **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom 5:8). Whoever believes in Him has eternal life, for in Him is life—life in the beginning, and now, and forevermore. As He cried out, **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now He said this about the Holy Spirit** (Jn 7:37–39).

This life—the life of Jesus and His Spirit—you have gushing within you. This life is given and received in Holy Baptism. Each day the old life is put to death and buried with Jesus, and His Spirit lives in us. This life is yours in His holy body and blood. What shall we do with this life, this eternal life that we have in Him? Live it! Just like the Samaritan woman! She wasn't afraid when He told her everything she'd ever done. That's what made her free. Finally, at long last, by a well she'd found a Man who loved her enough to lay down His life for her. A Man who washed her with living water and His word. A Man who covered her sins, so that she appears in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. So free that she can leave the old water jar behind, kick up her heels, and run back to town to tell you, **"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"**

Come, you who thirst, drink it up with her! There's no going back now, no going back to the old life or the former sins or the shame, no going back to the shadows of the past.

Those things no longer define you. Now you're identified with this Man and the living water that flows from His side, you're the bride of Christ, His beloved.

And now we can say to the woman, **"It's no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we've heard for ourselves, and we know that his is indeed the Savior of the world"** (v 42).

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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