

Text: John 4:5-26

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ 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.) ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "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." ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "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." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit^u and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit,^v and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ)^w "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst." (John 4:13,14)

Sermon Text:

Perhaps you have seen the scene on some movie screen. In the hot arid climate of the desert, some lonely soul staggers across the landscape. You can tell by the sunburnt skin and the dirt-covered frame that this person has been out in the heat far longer than they had planned without the proper equipment. As everything pans in to close up, the camera swings and we see the horizon as if through the eyes of the staggering individual. Through the hazy horizon, we begin to see an oasis, whether a mirage or the real thing the camera swings again and we see the person begin to form the words on their dried and cracked lips. Water! It's faint at first but as it is repeated the excitement builds, even the weak frame seems to strengthen as it musters all that it has to get to this greatest need. Water, sustenance, life!

As we come to the Words of our God, recorded in the Gospel of John this evening/morning in the verse right before our lesson we are told, *“Now Jesus had to go through Samaria.”* It could be translated as “it was necessary for Jesus to go through Samaria” or “Jesus needed to go through Samaria.” Three routes could be taken from Aenon near Salim to Galilee and most Jews wouldn’t have taken this route through Samaritan territory. But Jesus had to. Interesting isn’t it? Jesus had a need! God incarnate (in flesh) had to do something.

So the traveling band of men come to Jacob’s well near Sychar, close to the final resting place of Joseph’s remains after they were carried out of Egypt in the Exodus. It’s the sixth hour, either noon (in the heat of the day) or 6 pm (after a long day of travel) either way, we are told Jesus is tired and thirsty so he sits and waits for someone to come to draw water while the disciples go into town to stock up on provisions. And now, our Samaritan woman arrives at the well. And we soon discover water is not Jesus’ real need, nor the reason this route was picked.

Now it is of import to the lesson that she was Samaritan. We are told Jews and Samaritans don’t mix. Think deep seeded racism as our world speaks about it today and you probably have a close equivalent. But of equal note is that she is well a she. Men and women generally didn’t speak to one another outside of family units. That she is alone also would indicate what Jesus later reveals, she is an outcast ... a woman of ill repute an adulteress! No doubt she is shocked when He asks His question. Shocked to hear Him speak when everyone else shied away. She tries to warn him away, *“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”*

Ah, but here is the reason Jesus needed, had to, found it necessary to travel this way, it was this poor soul. *“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.”* Her interest is peaked but she also doesn’t quite understand what Jesus is saying. He goes on, *“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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.”*

Oh, now things begin to get really interesting. It turns out that while Jesus had a need, so does our woman, more in fact than she readily recognizes or admits. But so fascinating is the human preoccupation with the fleeting things of this world or the love of self. Our Samaritan woman wants this water of which Jesus speaks but not because of the spiritual and eternal benefit He has offered. Instead, it is because of the ease she believes it promises. No more daily trips to the well. No more scornful looks from the other women who have assembled there. Just an easier life.

It’s time to turn things away from the fleeting and worldly to the real need of our Samaritan woman. Jesus says, *“Go get your husband and come back.”* It turns out Jesus isn’t the rebel people like to paint Him as. He does seek to operate inside of social norms too but this is more than that. It exposes a deeper issue for our lonely lady at the well. It exposes her sinfulness. I wonder if there was another look of shock that accompanied the words, *“I have no husband”*. Oh but one doesn’t get away that easily, *“You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The 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,”* says Jesus.

Now, no doubt with astonishment on her face, she begins to realize something is remarkably different about this man. Still, she inserts her own felt needs though now they turn religious given the conversation. I have no clue if it’s a sincere question or something to deflect the intensity of the Law which has just once again confronted her, but worship now comes to mind. The Jews say they are right and we say we are right, settle it. Interesting that the little details prove to be tripping points. Jesus points out that the Samaritans in their worship practices which have become mingled with paganism don’t even know what they are doing anymore. The Jews may have the bloodlines of salvation and the law and the prophets but even this has been badly twisted by Pharisees and Sadducees who have lost the truth that their sacred writings possess. Spirit and Truth, faith and the Word which strengthens it, this is important.

One wonders in the guilt of her sin, when the last time she worshipped, either on the mountain or in Jerusalem, was.

Jesus' answers have hit bullseye after bullseye in the heart of the woman who had just come to do her daily duty at the well. This man had somehow broken into her life and seemed to peer into her very soul. It made her think of an ancient promise told to her as a child by her parents. I don't know if it was a poke to see if He was or a last-ditch effort to turn the conversation away from her and try to dismiss this invasive and uncomfortable conversation but *the woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*²⁶ Then Jesus declared, *"I, the one speaking to you – I am he."*

Life changing! The shock she had been experiencing as she talked to this strange man by the well would have all been eclipsed by this statement. We know it has the desired effect as we continue to read in the Scriptures. Though disciples interrupt the conversation and she runs off, she'll be back. Back with the live-in and the town that looked down on her with a confession of her own, She and the whole town around her *"believe that Jesus is the Savior of the World!"*

G.K. Chesterton, a famous catholic apologist, once wrote, *"I don't need a church to tell me that I am wrong where I know I am wrong. I need a church to tell me I am wrong where I think I am right!"* The Samaritan woman had this very need. So does every sinner, you and me included. It's one of the reasons we have places like this. Places devoted to the Spirit and Truth. Where God speaks in His Word and reaches out through His sacraments. Where living water flows in Law which exposes our sin and Gospel which announces a Savior who pays for it all and saves us from guilt and shame even as He holds out eternal life.

Oh dear friends, we likely all aren't a bunch of adultresses walking through the doors today. But how often haven't we imposed our own wants and needs over the greater needs our Savior addresses? How often haven't we desired the fleeting and worldly over the eternal and spiritual? How often haven't we made mountains out of molehills because we thought they might hide the bigger issues of the sins which separated us from God? How often haven't we come to the well not even fully understanding the needs which raged around and within us?

Thanks be to God for Jesus! He doesn't dismiss us but our needs become His own! He looks across the desert of time and sees us all and needs to come to us, exposes our need, and gives us the forgiveness that quenches our thirst. It's no mirage but as factual as the empty tomb on Easter morning. Yes, perhaps we've seen the scene on the movie screen before but today you are on Jesus' lips, You are His need and He supplies you with living water for the thirsty soul! Amen!