

Sermon Title: *And let all who are thirsty...*

**John 4:5-30,39-40**

*Narrator:* <sup>5</sup>Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, **Jesus:** 'Give me a drink'.

*Narrator:* <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'

*Narrator:* (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

<sup>10</sup>**Jesus:** '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.'

<sup>9</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?'

<sup>13</sup>**Jesus:** 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>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.'

<sup>15</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

<sup>16</sup>**Jesus:** Go, call your husband, and come back.

<sup>17</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** 'I have no husband.'

**Jesus:** 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!'

<sup>19</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:**, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.'

<sup>21</sup>**Jesus:** 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship our God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship our God in spirit and truth, for our God seeks such as these to give worship. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who offer their worship must worship in spirit and truth.'

<sup>25</sup>**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.'

<sup>26</sup>**Jesus:** 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

<sup>27</sup> *Narrator:* 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?' <sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

**SAMARITAN WOMAN:** <sup>29</sup>'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'

*Narrator:* <sup>30</sup>They left the city and were on their way to him. <sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days.

*Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*

In Jeremiah chapter two, God speaks to the people through the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."

Lent is a time to ponder the broken cisterns where we have tried to store our own water supply – the places we have sought to give us life, which have ultimately come up empty. In light of these broken and dry places, we hear Jesus say, *those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*

And for those of us who say to ourselves, if we just work a little harder, a few more hours, if we just get active in one more area of justice and peace, if we just love a little purer – a little deeper – if we just give of ourselves a little more – let us hear Jesus say, *those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty*

In a time when we feel increasingly hopeless, increasingly alone, increasingly worried over the state of our state, our country, our world – in a time when we forget that we are not the only ones working, that God is working all around, even though we often do not recognize it – we hear Jesus say, *those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*

This story that we have come to know as “The Woman at the Well.” Jesus speaks with this woman longer than he does to anyone else in all the Gospels—this is a longer recorded dialogue than with any of his disciples, longer than he talks to any of his accusers, longer than he talks to any of his own family members. She is the first person he reveals himself to in the Gospel of John – the first one that he tells his secret to, that he is the Messiah. She is the first non-Jew to guess who he is; she is the first evangelist, *John* tells us, that “many believed in him” because of her testimony.

Jesus enters a Samaritan city, he sits down by a well that tradition says to be the very one dug by Jacob, the great Patriarch of the faith, father of the 12 tribes of Israel. He sends his disciples out ahead to find food in the city, and about noon a Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well. And being tired and thirsty from his journey, it getting to be the heat of the day, he asks her for a drink.

Jesus initiates the interaction – not only has he come into the land of Samaria, [the region of those despised by the Jews] the “wrong side of the tracks”, so to speak – he speaks with a woman, something not normally done by a Jewish man (and certainly not a rabbi).

“How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” She asks him. “Your people, the Jews, you think you are better than us. You call us “half-breeds”, you say that our people are not allowed to marry your people because that would contaminate your bloodline – your people, less than a hundred years ago burned down our temple because you believed it to be impure and untrue – and you, want me to give you a drink?”

Jesus moves the conversation along – he says that he possesses Living Water.

She does not seem too impressed. “You are going to give me living water? You don’t even have a bucket – who do you think you are – do you think you are greater than our ancestor Jacob?!”

And Jesus now takes a step toward the personal, he tells her to go and call her husband. And after she tells him that she has no husband, he then makes it extremely personal – naming what is likely the most painful part of her life – that she has had five husbands and now lives with a man who is not her husband.

We should note that we do not know why this is: if it has been divorce, or death, or unfaithfulness – we do not know if she has been abused – we do not know whether she has been the victim of domestic abuse time and time and time again, if she has been with men who belittle and abuse her. We don’t know the circumstances of her life, nor should we presume to. But what we can presume is that however this has come into her life, it is a life full of pain, it is not the life she had hoped for or wanted. Whatever has brought this situation about, it is one that has left deep wounds. (This is what I try to remind myself when I am interacting with people at Corpus Christi House – I do not know what life circumstances have brought people to be homeless, but I can presume that however this has come to be in their lives, it is a life with much pain – a situation which has left deep wounds of feeling unworthy, of feeling unloved – that no matter how much we might think, “some people prefer to be homeless”, it is not the life anyone hoped for or wanted).

And so we know the reality of having had five husbands, however that came to be, has left her marginalized by her own people, by the other women of Sychar, Samaria. We know this because women would have gone to the well together in the mornings – they would have done

this for community and for protection – they would have gone before the heat of the day, and so that they had what they needed for their daily tasks.

When my uncle was in alternative service during the Vietnam war, he served in Africa, and part of his service story is like many development organizations of that era (and still today) – they built a well for the people – a well so that the women would not have to walk so far to get water each day. They built the well and went home. And he learned decades later that the well he spent so much time digging and preparing was never used, it was not used because they never asked the people if they wanted a well or not. The women did not use the well because the women of the village wanted to walk together to the river – it was their time to be together, to talk together, to laugh together, to be away from the men and children – it was their time to share life together. Our Samaritan Woman, she was not part of this daily ritual of womanhood, she did not go with the other women to the well – she went alone at noon. We do not know if she was told that she was not welcome, if one of the women pulled her aside and shamed her – told her she was not worthy of them. Or, whether she got sick of hearing people whisper when she came near. Or, it could be that she was welcome, only that she was too ashamed to go with them – that while, as so often happens, she would have been welcomed, but because of her own pain and shame, she believed that she would not be accepted, that it would simply be better for everyone if she just stayed away.

These are the people to whom Jesus comes time and time again, those who find themselves on the outside of their own communities – those who have in some way been pushed out – those who feel like they have no home among their own people. Jesus comes to those with

no community to help them feel secure in who they are, no community to be to them the love of God in human form. And so Jesus comes to these people, to be this love to them.

Back to their conversation: Jesus, he names this most painful part of her life – he names the biggest wound that she carries around – he names the part of her actual life (self) which is the furthest away from her ideal life (self). And her response to this is the same response that most of us have when someone – be it close friend or rabbi or therapist – gets a little too close to our deepest wounds, she changes the subject. She tries to move the conversation away from this painful personal note – she is feeling exposed, she is feeling vulnerable – so instead of discussing this area of pain, she tries to start a theological/political debate with Jesus. She brings up the great historical debate between the Jews and the Samaritans, where is the true and right place to worship, Mt. Gerazim or Jerusalem? This has been a great and continued division between these two ethnic groups – she wants to get away from pain, and a theological/political debate is a sure way to make that happen.

This would be like you, if you were a strong Democrat, and you know that your therapist was a strong supporter of Trump. And so when your therapist starts getting too close to the pain, your response is to ask, “who did you vote for, Trump or Hillary?” Or, it is how I like it when my Spiritual Director asks me questions about what Mennonites think about some topic, or how we function as a denomination organizationally – these are all areas of conversation that don’t force me to talk about anything uncomfortable, they don’t force me to examine anything internally – they are areas that keep the spotlight from shining on my own fears and wounds.

How uncomfortable she must have been to try and steer the conversation to this ancient political divide – seeking anyway out of this conversation about her own woundedness. She wants out.

But it does not work – he sidesteps her attempt to draw him into a theological debate – he is there to offer her Living Water, not to talk about trivial matters (which humans have given false importance to). When she steps tries to step out of the light, he keeps it focused on her.

He brings to light that thing which she most wants to keep in the dark; he acknowledges that deep and hidden place – that gap between her ideal self and her true self.

Imagine Jesus doing this with you, that thing which you most want to keep in the dark, that least want to ever discuss with others, that thing which makes you feel most vulnerable... Anger, alcohol, or apathy; your marriage difficulties, or the pain that parenting has brought you; pornography, or your parents; your debt or depression or divorce; the way you don't like who you see in the mirror, or a feeling of perpetual discontent; those things you never said, or those things you wish you had never said...whatever it might be, however you try to side-step this in most every conversation and interaction – the ways you try to keep this buried (perhaps even from yourself) – imagine Jesus approaching you when you are alone, imagine him looking you in the eye, and naming this truth of your life, naming this deep wound of your life.

Jesus does not tell the Samaritan Woman “go and repent and then come back and I will give you the living water”; he does not say, “Go and sin no more”, he does not say, “Go and get your crap together, then come back and see me.” He sees her – all of who she is – and he simply offers her Living Water, that water of which once she drinks, she will never be thirsty again. This is the deep and abiding love of God – the truth that God of the Cosmos is in love with her – that God delights in her – her very presence here on earth gives God delight. That she is worthy of such a love. This is what Jesus tells her, it is what he offers her – the truth that she is loved and adored. And once she comes to know that deep within her being, once she comes to drink from that cup of knowledge, she can stop trying to quench her thirst in other ways. Once she knows that she can stop trying to drink from those cracked cisterns that hold no water.

This, I believe, is what happened at that well, the kingdom of God broke in and the world was never the same again. It did not put an end to patriarchy, nor did it end the distaste between Samaritans and Jews, but light was shined into her life, love was applied to her wounds – and she was never the same again, the world was never the same again.