

Life-Giving, Life-Forming Water
John 4:5-26
March 23, 2014

[Jesus] came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.) 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." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 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." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 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." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Grace, mercy, and peace from our spring of life-giving water, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I wonder how many of us have ever felt like the Samaritan woman we heard about in today's Gospel reading. This woman had to feel like an outcast. Have you ever felt like an outcast? Feelings of being an outcast come when you're in the company of other people who don't accept you as you are. These people would rather you change to be more like them. Or, should you decide not to be like them, they would appreciate it if you would just go away.

This Samaritan woman certainly was an outcast. She was an outcast to her own people because of her lifestyle. We know this because this woman had come to the town well at noon to draw water. Women of proper respect came to the well in the morning before the sun was too high, when the temperature was more reasonable. A woman of shame would come to the well at noon, in the heat of the day, to avoid the haughty stares and

the whispered comments.

This Samaritan woman was a social outcast because social decorum of the day allowed for a woman to be divorced no more than three times to maintain respectability. This woman had been divorced five times. And, if that wasn't enough, she was living with gentleman number six and they weren't married.

But the fact that this Samaritan woman was a social outcast wasn't the biggest problem in her life. There was another way in which she was an outcast that posed a much larger problem. Because of her sins, and not just her marital sins but all of her sins, this woman was an outcast from God. Both the sins she had committed and the Sin she was born with put her at odds with the Lord.

This was the condition of the Samaritan woman when Jesus met her at the town well. Her life wasn't a very pretty picture. Maybe you see yourself in her story. Maybe you don't. Either way, we all have some things in common with this woman of ill repute. Let's look at her life so we can look at our lives.

This woman was proud of her town's history. She was a part of the people who claimed the well Jacob had dug. This was a 2000 year old well, dug by the grandson of Abraham, and her town owned that well. And she was proud of that. Furthermore, because this well was on Mt. Gerizim and not Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, she was more than proud that her people worshiped in the proper place.

But for all the wonderful things about her town this woman was willing to parade before Jesus, she was not so forthcoming about her personal past. She tried to side-step Jesus when he asked to speak to her husband. She wasn't all that open about the dirty details of her history. But Jesus very tactfully draws out the parts of her past she needed to deal with. She needed to shine the light of truth on her past so she could walk away from it.

So it is with us. Often we are very willing to discuss selected things about ourselves and our history. We will brag about the successful people who have preceded us in our family line. We will talk about how proud we are of our town, our alma mater, our parents, our children. Too often, we will talk about anything except the things we really need to get out in the open and talk about – even when we're talking to God.

Like it was with the Samaritan woman, Jesus is not interested in our benign reminiscing. Like it was with the Samaritan woman, Jesus wants us to bare our deepest darkest secrets so he can erase the burden of our past misdeeds. Just like in Old Testament ^(Gen 12:1-8), where God called on Abraham to leave everything he knew and step into a new life, Jesus calls us to look at where we have been and then walk away from it to follow him.

Now, it's understandable why the Samaritan woman was reluctant to open up her life for examination. I'm sure we all know the feeling of having something in our past we'd rather not talk about. But we all need to open up our lives to God. We need to lay before

him everything we've ever been and everything we've ever done. We need to lay before him everything we do and everything we are. Only when we're completely honest with God can he do for us what we so desperately need.

When we lay our sin before our Lord, he takes that sin and he drowns it in his righteous blood. He wipes the slate clean. He stamps our bill of sin "paid in full." Then, just like with the Samaritan woman, Jesus offers us a new lease on life. Jesus offers us living water – a life connected to him that wells up to eternal life. Today's reading tells of a woman in desperate need of a Savior and how Jesus came to her. Today, you are a person in desperate need of a Savior and now Jesus comes to you.

Is it important that Jesus comes to someone? Let's see. When Jesus comes, he comes bearing four gifts. Gifts you can't buy. Gifts you can't earn. Gifts that only come from the grace of God. These gifts bring about both temporal and eternal changes to those who don't refuse them.

The first gift of Jesus is peace. When Jesus took that cup of water from the Samaritan woman, he showed just how far he was willing to go to reach God's lost children. Jews and Samaritans had been committed enemies for over a thousand years. A good Jew wouldn't even speak to a Samaritan, let alone accept a drink of water from a Samaritan woman in a Samaritan cup. Furthermore, Jewish rabbis would rarely speak to any woman in public, especially an outcast, foreign Samaritan woman.

But Jesus came to this outcast woman. He came to make peace. Not peace between a Jew and a Samaritan, but peace between God and one of his wayward children. Because of our sinful nature we are outcasts from God. We are enemies of God. But when Jesus comes to us, he brings the grace-gift of God's peace.

Jesus is the treaty of peace that exists between a righteous God and his sinful children. The peace Jesus brings is an eternal peace. This peace isn't something you will have in the future. This peace is with you now and will stay with you forever.

The second grace-gift is the gift of forgiveness. Notice, forgiveness is a gift. It's not something you can earn. Jesus has earned your forgiveness for you. When Jesus announced to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah, he was saying the forgiveness of God has arrived. I'm here!

Implied in that announcement was Jesus' commitment to follow the road that would lead to the cross. The forgiveness Jesus won for us came at a very high price. To be the promised Messiah, Jesus would have to take the Samaritan woman's sin, your sin, my sin, the sins of the whole world to the cross. He, himself, would have to become the outcast, the rejected Son of the Father. He would have to be crucified outside the city as someone who was unclean. Jesus would have to take our uncleanness upon himself in order to wash us clean.

That washing is the third grace-gift of Jesus. Jesus left behind the gift of two holy sacraments so we might have entrance into and acceptance in the family of God. In

your baptism, the streams of living water, which flow from our Savior, washed you clean and made you an heir to the Kingdom of God. Through baptism, those who were formerly considered outcasts are now considered children. Those who were once outside God's grace and now in full possession of God's grace.

Jesus also left for us his holy Supper. Jesus said: *Take, eat this is my body given for you. Take, drink this is my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt 26:26-27). Through this holy Supper, Jesus renews our forgiveness, and strengthens the faith the Holy Spirit placed in our hearts. When we come to the Lord's Table, we are assured that our sins have been washed whiter than snow.

The fourth grace-gift Jesus brings is, of course, the gift of eternal life. With our sins washed away, there is nothing standing between us and God. Only a sinless person can stand in the presence of God. Only a sinless person can have a positive relationship with God. Only a sinless person can hope to spend eternity with God.

The living water Jesus brought into the Samaritan woman's life, the living water Jesus has brought into your life, the living water Jesus has brought into every believer's life is the living water that *"will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* Your thirsty soul, now and forever, will be satisfied by the living water Christ brings.

Recognizing our shameful past and our sinful origin, we can cast aside our pride and thank God for sending his Son to satisfy our thirst souls with the waters that become a life-giving spring within us. Baptized as God's people and assured of our forgiveness and acceptance in the Lord's Holy Supper, our certain future is eternal life beside the *"river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God"* (Rev 22:1).