

Sermon for March 8, 2026  
"Living Water"

John 4:5-42

What was her name? We're not sure. The Bible doesn't tell us. For the purpose of discussion we could call her Carol, or Cathy, or Janice, or just about anything. Her story is the story of so many women and men. We usually just call her "the woman at the well." And that's good enough because the well, the source of water, is an important part of her story.

We may not know her name, but we do know something about her. She was thirsty. She had come to draw water from the well on a hot day. She came to get something to drink, but in reality, her thirst was deeper than that. Even among the outcast Samaritans, she was an outsider. This woman was a woman with a past; a reputation. Everyone knew her past. She had had five husbands and was living with a man she wasn't married to.

She needed more than water. She needed some peace from the turmoil and chaos of emotions and relationships in which she lived. She needed forgiveness and release of the shame that she lived in. She needed the love that she so desperately sought but failed to find five times. She needed someone she could trust and believe in. She needed a Savior; a Messiah!

The woman at the well needed a lot of things but it was her need for water that brought her to the well and a chance encounter with Jesus. It was the middle of the day and the sun was hot. Women usually didn't come to the well in the heat of the day. They usually came in the early morning or in the evenings. Carrying a large jar of water may have been women's work, but it was hard work. It was much easier to do that work in the cool of the day. Some have suggested that the woman at the well came in the middle of the day to avoid the crowds that were at the well in the evenings and mornings. She wanted to avoid all those sidelong glances and the whispers behind her back. She wanted to avoid the experience of being shunned by the more "respectable" women of the village. It was bad enough being a Samaritan, but to be shunned by them was worse.

So there she was, and there was Jesus, and Jesus reached out to her in her loneliness and said, "Excuse me, may I have a drink of water." The woman was probably shocked that Jesus had spoken to her. She could tell by his accent and dress that he was a Jew and Jews didn't talk to Samaritans, especially Samaritans like her, and she was a woman. The Rabbis taught that Jewish men were not supposed to speak directly to a woman in public. Much less to a Samaritan woman like her. Walls had been constructed between Jesus and this woman. Society had placed walls designed and intended to keep Samaritans and women in their place. Also years of bad experiences with men had led the woman to build walls in her heart: walls of mistrust and bad feelings.

But the woman had come to the well in need of a drink. So Jesus reached across the barriers to touch the woman. He reached across the barriers of racial prejudice. He reached across the barriers of sexism. He reached across the barriers of shame and guilt. He reached across the barriers between good and bad, and Jesus asked her for a drink of water. You see, like the woman, Jesus was thirsty too. It was a hot day and he and the disciples had been walking since sunup. He needed water for his parched throat, but I think Jesus had a deeper thirst. I believe he sensed the deeper thirst in her, and out of compassion he needed to offer her help. He yearned to touch and heal the hurt and pain and mistrust. To fill the emptiness of her soul with the love and peace of the Heavenly Father.

Maybe if they pooled their resources, they could help each other. You see Jesus needed physical water but he didn't have a rope or bucket to draw the water from the well. The woman did have a bucket, and so she had access to all the water they both needed. She, on the other hand, had a deep need for spiritual water. Jesus had access to an infinite supply of what she needed most: the love of God.

But Jesus' boldness surprised the woman, and she quickly reminded him of the barriers

between them that he had just ignored. "How is it that you, a Jew, speak to me, a Samaritan and a woman?" Jesus replied, "If only you knew of God's grace and who I am, you would ask me for living water." "But you have no rope or bucket how would you get me water? Anyway my ancestors dug this well. Are you saying that its water is inferior?"

Jesus had begun the dialogue around their mutual need for water and now he had the chance to deepen the discussion. "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water I will give will never again thirst. The water I give will become a source of eternal life in the heart those who accept it."

This made the woman more curious, but she still failed to catch the significance of what Jesus was saying. So she said, "Give me this water. Then I won't get thirsty and have to come draw water every day." Now Jesus had a chance to touch that part of her that hurt and heal it. "Go get your husband and bring him here." She probably winced at that request, "I have no husband."

Jesus had touched her pain and now had a chance to offer healing. "You're right. You have five husbands and the man you are with now is not married to you." "How did he know that?" she thought. "And if he knew that, why is he talking to me?" "You're a prophet," she replied. So she asked him a religious question to change the subject, "Should we worship in the hills like the Samaritans or in Jerusalem like the Jews?"

Jesus replied, "That is not the real issue. You Samaritans don't know what you are doing and the Jews are right, but, soon all that will mean nothing. The time is coming, and has already arrived, when real believers will worship in Spirit and in Truth. After all that is the kind of worship God wants. God is spirit and the place isn't what is important. What is important is the spirit of the ones worshipping."

"I know," said the woman, "that the Messiah is coming and when he arrives, he will teach us much we do not know. Maybe he can explain these things." Then Jesus replied, "I am the one you are thinking of. I am the one who can answer all your questions. I am the one who can save you from your sin!"

Are you thirsty? Is there a dryness anywhere in your life? Is there a part of your heart that has been burnt by the heat of someone else's hate? Is there a part of your soul that you have failed to water and like a neglected house plant is brown and wilting. Is there a need in you for love, forgiveness, and acceptance? Do you ever thirst for something deeper and more meaningful in life?

Come to the well. Meet Jesus there. He will give you living water. Water that brings new life to the dead parts of our hearts and souls. Once we have drank of that water we will never thirst again for eternity.

Jesus already knows you better than you know yourself. He is a prophet who can see to the heart of our sin and need. As with the woman at the well he can see the turmoil in our lives. He can see the pain of betrayal. Accept him and his gift of living water, new life, eternal life.

But I think most of you know that already. I believe most of you have already drank that living water: you already have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, and you go to that well daily, but look around you. Around you is a world dying of thirst for living water. People are seeking something and they are looking in the worst places. They are looking to flesh, drugs, wealth, power, or self for life.

But we know that Jesus is the only source of living water. What people need is a relationship with Jesus Christ. I am not saying that all a persons' problems will disappear because they give their lives to Christ. They may still live in poverty or oppression or loneliness or illness or whatever. I am saying that through Christ they will have the strength to face whatever life throws at them. The problem is: How do we reach out to them? In this incident Jesus gives us an example. Jesus looked around him and he saw a need. It was a simply need, a need for a drink. So he shared his need and started a relationship, but more importantly he started a relationship with someone that everyone else would have ignored. Jesus simply reached out in love in a small way at first.

Jesus reached across the barriers of hatred and prejudice and ignorance, and we have to do the same. Simply reach out in friendship and love. How many of you know your neighbors or your coworkers. How can you love your neighbor if you don't know them? Offer people a relationship with you as a Christian friend and then maybe they can develop a relationship with Christ.

People need the Lord. So offer them God's love. Offer them Jesus the source of living water.