

Sermon for March 16, 2014 – Lent 2

John 4:5-26 (NIV84)

Theme: Lord, give us water to drink

We are dying of thirst, and only you have the water of life.

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 the sixth hour. 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 flocks and herds?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." 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 fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, 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 spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵ 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 who speak to you am he."

Visitors to Arizona are warned to drink lots of water – even when they aren't thirsty. Why? Because sweat evaporates so quickly in the dry heat that a person doesn't even realize he's dehydrating. In other words, a person could be slowly dying of thirst and not even realize it.

The whole world is dying of spiritual thirst, and it doesn't even realize it. The heat of sin dehydrates our souls and, without the refreshing water of life, we will die: eternally. Thankfully, our sermon text tells us that Jesus has the water we need to soothe our sin scorched souls. This is why we pray: **Lord, give us water to drink.** *We are dying of thirst, and only you have the water of life.*

Part One: We are dying of thirst

Our text takes place when Jesus and his disciples were traveling north from Judea towards Galilee –through a region called Samaria. The people who lived in this area were a mixed race and didn't like the Jews all that much. (The Jews didn't care for the Samaritans either)

At the sixth hour (noon time by our reckoning) Jesus stopped at a well near Sychar – tired and thirsty from his journey. His disciples left him alone to rest at the well while they went into town to buy food.

A lone Samaritan woman came to the well at this time – a peculiar act, since people usually got water during the cooler part of the day and not when it's hot. Could it be that she wanted to be alone? As we will hear later in this account, she had lived a rather scandalous life in that town

Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" The woman was rather shocked that Jesus spoke to her. You see, most Jews went out of their way to avoid Samaritans because they hated them so much.

However, Jesus didn't see this woman as a Samaritan, but as a soul who was dying of spiritual thirst and needing the water that only he had to offer. *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. [105 feet deep, to be exact] 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." Jesus makes it clear that he isn't talking about physical water. He was talking about spiritual water that refreshes the soul and gives spiritual life.

You see, all people on this earth are spiritually thirsty. For what? For forgiveness, peace and happiness. All People are constantly looking for ways to quench their guilty consciences. Some try to do it through material gain – thinking that more toys brings more happiness and make us forget that silly little nagging voice that tells us something is wrong. Others believe various new-age, feel-good, nature-type religions will give them true peace. Still others think that by doing good deeds for others and by promoting “the goodness of humanity” they can find relief for their spiritual thirst. But the truth is that all these things are merely cactus water.

What do I mean by calling them “cactus water”? I learned from a park ranger that drinking the water from a cactus might make you temporarily feel better, but it will also give you diarrhea and make you more dehydrated than before. In spite of what you have seen in old cowboy movies, if you drink a lot of cactus water, it will make you sick. Cactus water kills!

The spiritual water the world runs after is like cactus water. It may make you feel good, but drinking it makes you worse off than before. How so? Because it gives you a false sense of peace, while driving you further away from your true God and Savior. Materialism, new-age spirituality, human goodness – these things can't take away sin, but only incur God's wrath because, the Bible says, “*everything that does not come from faith is sin.*” (Rom 14:23 NIV84)

Part Two: Only you have the water of life

Only Jesus has the spiritual water our thirsty souls need: water that forgives our sins, reconciles us with God and gives eternal life to all who drink it. What is this living water? The Gospel (the good news of Jesus's gift of forgiveness) in both Word and Sacrament. Through these means, God creates a new life in us: one that thirsts after God through repentance and finds forgiveness and peace in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for us.

But the Samaritan woman didn't understand this yet: *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."* In other words, she still didn't quite

recognize her true need for Jesus. She only thought of her physical needs and how Jesus could alleviate them. She wanted Jesus to make her life a little easier, but this is not why he came.

We too are often like the Samaritan woman: so focused on our earthly existence that we don't recognize our spiritual need for forgiveness and salvation. For example, if we were to write down all the things we pray for, how many would have to do with physical things instead of spiritual? Now, Jesus certainly invites us to pray to him for everything including our earthly needs and wants, but we should also recognize that He didn't suffer and die on the cross in order to make our earthly life more livable. He came to restore our relationship with God; to win for us forgiveness and hope. We are spiritually dehydrated and many times don't even realize it – just like the Samaritan woman. And this is why Jesus told her: *"Go, call your husband and come back."*

Then it hits her: *"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."

Jesus didn't say these things to disgrace the woman. He wanted her to realize that she was dying of spiritual thirst. Jesus' question, "Go, call your husband and come back," was like him saying, "See how thirsty you are! You are dying spiritually because you have not kept God's law as he demands. Go, then, lay before me all of your deep and hidden sins in repentance and I will relieve you of them all. You need the true water of forgiveness that only I can give you."

What Jesus did to the woman, he also does to us too. We may not like it when a fellow Christian shows us our sin. We might even get upset. Why? Because we don't want to admit that we are dying of spiritual dehydration. But when your brother or sister in Christ shows you your sins, understand that he is doing it by Christ's command and out of love. He doesn't want you to die from the spiritual dehydration of impenitence. He wants you to drink the water of forgiveness by repenting of your sins. He wants your soul refreshed so that you can have true peace with God.

The Samaritan woman started to feel her thirst, but she still didn't know how to quench it. She didn't know that she was talking to the Savior. *"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."* She knew that worship was important, but which form is the one that God likes? The Jews say you have to worship God one way, the Samaritans another – so which is correct?

Many people ask the same question today. Some people claim that God is only pleased with traditional, liturgical worship. Others claim that we have to be more modern – that we have to adapt to our culture – using modern technology, instruments and music. Who's right?

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."

Jesus says that salvation comes from the Jews. In other words, before Christ came, their way of worship was the only correct way because every facet of it was instituted by God with the purpose of pointing to the coming Christ. But now that the Messiah has come, the outward form of worship is not what's essential. God looks at the heart. He wants worshipers who believe his Word, confess their sins, and who look to his Son for forgiveness.

As long as all the customs and forms we use give glory to God and point to Christ alone, the LORD does not want us to worry and argue about the way we worship. King David wrote: *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise* (Psalm 51:16,17). Yes, the worship God desires is worship from the heart: one in which we confess our sins to God and receive the water of life by trusting in his Son for forgiveness.

The woman understood what Jesus said, but still didn't know he was the Savior, who could truly quench her spiritual thirst for forgiveness. *The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."* And Jesus was pleased to announce to her: *"I who speak to you am he."*

The Bible tells us that the woman was so overjoyed to hear Jesus say this, that she left her jar of water and ran back to town to tell others that she had met the Messiah. She wanted her whole community to get the same water of forgiveness she had just received from Jesus.

We too have drunk from the same well as the Samaritan woman. May this living water overflow into our mouth and hands that we, with the same zeal as the Samaritan woman, invite others to come see Jesus.

And so we pray: "Dearest Jesus, give us your water to drink. Our souls are parched by sin. We are dying of thirst, and many times we don't even realize it. Only you have the water that can refresh us to eternity. Only you can make us a spring of water, welling up love, peace and forgiveness in us to eternal life. Lord Jesus, our Savior from sin, grab hold of us. Teach us your ways. Never leave us. Prevent us from wandering from you, our spring of life, so that that we don't die apart from you in the desert of sin. Amen.