

February 17, 2008

Lent 2

"Come to Jesus the Water of Life"

JOHN 4: 5-26

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷When 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.) ⁹The 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.^[a]) ¹⁰Jesus 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?" ¹²Are 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?" ¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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." ¹⁵The 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." ¹⁶He 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. 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." ¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet 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. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." ²⁵The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

If I were to ask one of our ushers to get me a drink of water, within less than a minute they could grab a white cup such as this and fill it with water from the drinking fountain or the faucet in the kitchen. We take for granted how easy it is for us to access water for drinking, cooking and bathing. This is not the case in some undeveloped parts of the world, and it was certainly not the case at the time of Jesus. Getting water meant going to a stream, or spring or well that had been dug in the ground, filling containers and bringing them home. The local well became a place where people of the community interacted with each other every day.

It was at such a well, a famous well, Jacob's well, a well used for centuries, that our Lord Jesus established contact with a Samaritan woman. He used the illustration of water to

tell her that he was the water of life. He is the one who quenches the thirst we have to be loved and accepted by God. This morning as we take a closer look at how Jesus interacted with this woman, we want to think of how he has come into our lives and convinced us that he is our pure source of eternal life. We also want to learn from his example so that we can do a better job of building bridges to people and sharing with them Jesus the water the life.

He knows the thirst

"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." Jacob's well was there. In fact you can still visit this famous well if you travel to Palestine in this region between Jerusalem and Galilee. The current well is about 150 feet deep. It has a church over it and is tended by Greek Orthodox priests who lower a bucket and let you drink water from Jacob's well.

Jesus came to the well, "tired as we he was from the journey." He sat down by the well. It was the middle of the day. Jesus was tired. He was hungry. His disciples had gone into town to buy food. He was thirsty. Never did Jesus use his power as God to provide food and water for himself, or even ease the pain and suffering he endured for our sins. In the tired eyes of Jesus and his weary body you see how much Jesus loves you with an intense personal love.

A Samaritan woman arrives at the well to draw water and take it home with her. Jesus asks her, "Will you give me a drink?" She cannot believe what she is hearing. Here is a man talking to her, a man who was a Jew, a man who was a rabbi talking to a woman. He broke all the rules. Jews and Samaritans did not get along because the Samaritans were half breeds, people who had intermarried with foreigners planted in the land by the Assyrians 700 years before Jesus was born. They even had their own worship place in Gerizim which was totally against Old Testament law that said worship could only be carried on in the temple in Jerusalem. She is astounded! "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Jesus shows us how to build bridges with people. How can we do a better job of building bridges with people, even people who are not like us or in our comfort zone?

If only this woman knew the man to whom she was talking was the Messiah, her Lord and God. Oh, dear Christian, see how Jesus begins to reveal himself to her. See how he creates a thirst in her to have him as the water of life. "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." If only people knew that salvation and eternal life and God's unfailing love were a pure gift of God, and not something they earn on their own. If only the whole world knew who that person was talking to this woman. If only they knew Jesus as not just a tired Jew who needed a drink of water 2000 years ago, but Lord and God who came into our world to save us from our sin. If people only knew Jesus they would ask him, the water of life, to give them eternal salvation.

This Samaritan woman is beginning to sense Jesus has something special to offer her. When she heard about living water, she thought of cold fresh spring of water bubbling up out of the ground. How could this mysterious stranger, this Jew, this tired and hungry Jew

offer her such water? "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" Jesus did not even have a bucket and a rope. Did Jesus think he was greater than Jacob who dug this well, a well that gave water to generations of people and flocks and herds. Everyone talked about the good water from Jacob's well. It made the area famous and Jesus claims he has something better to offer! How could he make such a claim?

Jesus pursues this lost woman with his love for all people. Pointing to the well, to Jacob's well, that famous well that has watered thousands of people for many generations, Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." If you drink a bottle of water, you will have to drink more water later in the day. Experts say we should drink about 8 glasses of water a day. Nothing in this life lasts whether it is water, or food, or health, or even the good we try to do. Only Jesus can offer us something that lasts forever. Only Jesus can create in us a living faith that springs up inside of us that believes in him as our Savior and allows us to live forever. In John 7 Jesus told the people in Jerusalem, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Has anyone here ever seen a spring bubbling up from the ground with fresh water? If you had such a spring on your property you could dump loads of dirt on it and eventually the water will find its way through the dirt and start bubbling up again. So it is with Jesus. You can have the worst week in your life here on this earth, but still bubbling up inside of you is this amazing spring, Jesus the water of life. You can dump a thousands dump trucks full of problems and troubles on this love of God that Jesus has earned for you, and still it bubbles up and finds its way into your life. Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Samaritan woman does not yet experience the need for Jesus as the water of life. "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to come back here to draw water." Would it be great if we could have a bottle of "Miracle Water?" Drink it once and never have to drink water again. She banters with Jesus. She must know that he is speaking about something different, something better, that she does not have in her life. Never in her life has she ever been in the presence of someone whose love for people and for her was pure and holy as that of Jesus.

The conversation now changes. Jesus takes over. He asks the woman to call her husband. She says she has no husband. Jesus tells her that she is telling the truth when she says she has no husband. She has actually had five husbands and the man she was living with was not her husband. Imagine being in the presence of someone who knows your life even though you have not met him before. Imagine having a Savior who knows everything that you ever did in your life, every bad word you ever spoke, every angry moment, every greedy thought, every failure to show kindness and love, every evil lustful thought that could ever enter into your mind. Psalm 139 says of the Lord, "He is thoroughly acquainted with all our ways." Jesus took the lid off her stinking mess of sin.

I am holding in my hand a jar. I can have something very smelly in this jar, something that has been in the refrigerator for months, rotten onions, old beans or old garlic. Set it

out on the counter, let it warm up in the sun, and then open the cover and the smell will fill the room. As long as we can keep a lid on our sin we think we have ourselves covered. No body knows. No body smells how bad we are. We deceive our selves, but as 1 John 1 tells us, the truth is not in us. We may think we are better than others. We may even try to do good with the false hope that we can keep sin sealed and away from God. But Jesus knows. That is why he invites us to come to him. That is why he spent time with this woman at the well even though he was tired, hungry and exhausted. He wanted the lid taken off of her sin, so she would see how awful she was, and how much she need him for salvation. As we sing in the hymn, "Foul and full of sin I am, I am all unrighteousness."

He quenches your thirst

The woman senses that Jesus is a great prophet. How else would he know about the terrible life she had been living? It puzzles me that she asks a religious question about the right place to worship, especially after her sin has been exposed and the stench has been revealed. But then how often don't people want to steer conversations away from themselves when it comes to religion and talk about religious questions that do not involve them.

Notice what Jesus does. He does not say to her, "Listen woman I am talking to you about your problem." He uses her question to draw her closer to himself. He tells about salvation being from the Jews and a time when people will worship in spirit and in truth. The sacrifices in Jerusalem pointed to the great sacrifice for sin that would take place in Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. She hears words about worshiping in spirit and truth. She confesses to a longing in her heart. "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us." The Jesus declared to her, "I who speak to you am he."

You know the rest of the story. You know how she ran into town and told people, "Come and see the man who knew everything about me. Come and see the Messiah, our Savior, the Lamb of God, the water of life." As we just sang in the hymn: "I came to Jesus and I drank, Of that life giving stream; My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in him." May the Lord Jesus help us meet someone at the well this week and bring them this living water. Amen.