

September 19, 2021 Daring Greatly: Jesus & Samaritan Woman-**Living Water**  
**Pastor Gina Hendrickson**

**First Reading: John 4:5-30, 39 (The Message)**

To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.) The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking *me* for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water." The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life." The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!" He said, "Go call your husband and then come back." "I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough." "Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?" "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem.

You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.” The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”

“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.” Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn’t believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?” And they went out to see for themselves. Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman’s witness: “He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!”

Here’s some fun facts that I discovered this week in preparation for today’s message: Scientists tell us that the earth is made up of 326 million trillion gallons of water. That’s 326 with 18 zeros after it!



Of that amount, 98% is in the oceans & unfit for human consumption, unless desalinated. That means that 2% is fresh water. But 1.6% of that fresh water is frozen in the polar ice caps & in glaciers. Another .36% is in underground wells, and just .036% in lakes and rivers.

Now when it comes to the human body, we are 65% water.



Nutritionists tell us that we should drink at least 8 glasses of water a day. Staying hydrated helps with digestion, weight control, and even the reduction of wrinkles in our faces. Water is core to our health and our world. Without water we simply cannot survive!

So I thought what a great week to stop at a well in Samaria with our Lord to “**drink in**” the Living Water of Christ.

Today’s passage from John is the longest recorded conversation that any of the gospel writers remember Jesus having with one particular individual. And it shouldn't surprise us so much that conversation was not with another preacher, not with a member of his family, not with one of his disciples, not with a fellow Jew, and not even with a man.

This was a conversation with a Samaritan woman of questionable reputation, which was, itself, a violation of several social norms of the day. But Jesus was always doing those kinds of things, which is why we probably shouldn't be surprised.

As I reflected upon today’s passage, three key words kept bubbling up: Well, Water and Witness. Like Pastor Jess I like alliteration too!

**Wells** were (and still are) life...



Life for people trying to live in the wilderness & desert areas of the Middle East.

You can see a typical well one would have found in Jesus' day and are still constructed today in some areas. For the Hebrews as a refugee people living in a dry and dusty land, roaming for 40 years in the wilderness...the promise of a land with water seemed like the promise of paradise.

But the places where clean, drinkable water was available, were limited & people depended on wells, many of which had been dug or bought hundreds of years before by some of the great heroes of Israel. The well in today's story was located in Samaria, an area considered "off limits" for good, law-abiding Jews.

The Pharisees, who were law-abiding religious leaders, considered it so undesirable that if travel forced you to pass through Samaria, you were required to stop at the border of Israel and pound the nasty Samarian dust off your sandals before continuing into the land. Most people took a long detour around Samaria when traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. But, of course, not Jesus.

Today a Greek Orthodox monastery stands over the site of Jacob's well located near the town of Nablus.



In the crypt of the monastery is the simple stone well that Jacob bought 4000 years ago for 100 pieces of silver. It is 130 feet deep and clear, cold water can still be drawn from it. How cool is that?

2000 years ago, a weary Jesus sent his disciples into the town to find some food for lunch, and sat down by himself at that well. It is at the well that Jesus meets a Samaritan woman. It's no surprise that a woman was there. The oddity was the time of her visit.



Women didn't go to wells in midday when the sun was high overhead and the heat was oppressive. Women went to wells early in the morning. And they used the daily meeting as a time for sharing & connecting with ea other. An analogy that I think works is that **wells** were the Starbucks of the day. It was a place of socialization, or networking and yes, of gossiping.

So, the fact that this Samaritan woman comes to the well at noon tells us something. Of course it may simply have been that she was delayed on this particular day, but

the conversation she has with Jesus suggests another reason. Either she wasn't welcome to come early with the other women...or she is intentionally avoiding them. We discover she has had five husbands and is currently living with a guy whom she has not married. This woman was probably an outcast in her own town. So she came to the well alone.

**Which brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> key word this morning ~ Water.**

Both are there for water, for relief...but Jesus initiates a prolonged conversation with this questionable woman...a discussion that is really taking place on two levels. As was the case with Nicodemus—a great story told just 1 chapter earlier in John—who heard Jesus' talk about being born anew only on the level of physical birth, so too the Samaritan woman thinks Jesus is simply talking about water as H<sub>2</sub>O. So He says, “You should be asking ME for a drink, and I would give you fresh, **living** water.”

Now this is important, because "Living water" had a particular meaning in that culture and time.



Living water was moving water, like the water of a river or stream. As such, it was more desirable than still, well water. For example, wells, if left uncovered, could contain dead animals that had fallen in, or buckets whose ropes had broken, and any other manner of assorted debris. Living water ran clear and clean, was significantly more desirable, & harder to find. If you had a choice to get living water rather than well water, you would jump at the chance. Because Jesus asked for her to get him a drink from the well and then said that he had living water, she was confused.

So He continued saying that the water he could give her would take away her thirst forever and that the "well" itself would be located within her. It would bubble up with living water for eternal life, like a “gushing fountain of endless life.” But like

Nicodemus, missing the point, she asked for that physical gift of water so she wouldn't be thirsty again or have to come back to the well and haul up buckets of water.

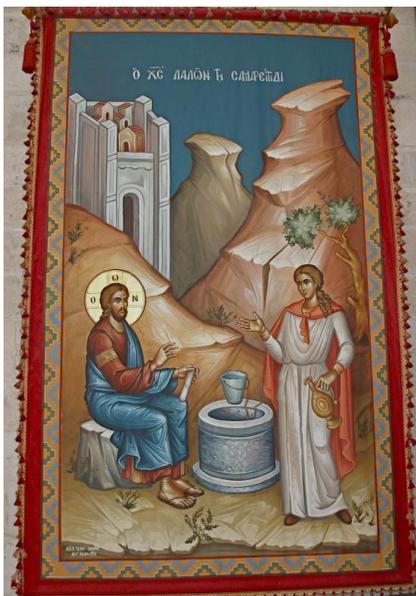
Jesus is telling her about the gift of Living Water...



The gift of Living Water being that of a *spiritual* life, but she doesn't get that clearly until Jesus tells her exactly who he is.

**Which moves me to the final key word today: Witness.** And this is where our Daring Greatly series connects so powerfully. There are actually three witnesses made in today's passage: Jesus makes a witness to the Samaritan woman of who he is. The woman makes a witness to the town of who Jesus is...and then John, the Gospel writer, makes a witness to us, the hearers of this amazing Story concerning the nature of God AND who we ought to be.

Let's start with the first witness as given by Jesus—



When Jesus starts to talk about the Samaritan woman's personal life, she immediately changes the subject to a question about where God really wanted people to worship. So he patiently goes into teaching mode, explaining that God cares most of all about what happens in the heart...in the spirit.

Jesus, daring greatly, continues to cross the arbitrary boundaries of race, Gender and social norms, and now religious law to boldly proclaim that—"It's who **you are** and the **way you live** that count before God." It won't matter what you're called—Samaritan or Jew—Or where you go to worship on this mountain or that one. Jesus says with fiery passion—"Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth, while simply and honestly being yourself. Its who you are and the way you live that count before God."

The Samaritan woman responds by saying, "Well I don't know about that...but when the Messiah comes, He will explain all of this." And Jesus says with a smile,



*(art work by Bryn Gillette)*

"YES! Now you've got it! I am he." You don't have to wait any longer or look any further! So the first witness is the one Jesus makes about his own **true identity**. I just want to pause...& ask you to take a moment and drink in this powerful image. I love this piece of artwork from Bryn Gillette. Its an image that been compelling for me as I see the vibrancy of what is coming alive from the Living Water of Jesus. It leads me to see this sacred moment at a well...as a moment Filled with the transformative power of strength and hope in Christ.

The second WITNESS is the one the woman makes to the people in her town. And I love this artwork because if you look closely...you can see over the Samaritan woman's shoulder, the people and village to which she is connected. As a response to the Witness of Jesus, she returns to her village. And to her credit she doesn't get into some big theological explanation about what happened to her at the well. She just says daring greatly, "You know what a mess I have made of my life. But I met this man who has given me hope and a promise of something eternal that will never dry up. Come and see him."

Oh my friends, the strongest witness you and I can ever make...is the one that starts with the word, "I." Hear the difference: "Let me tell you about this guy who once was sure he met Jesus..." verses..."I want to tell you about the day I met Jesus at Jacob's well..." Big difference. The strongest witness you and I can ever make is the one that starts with the word, "I." Talk about daring greatly!

- I want to share with you how Jesus changed my life after my parents divorced.
- I want to tell you about how Jesus showed me how to forgive, despite being deeply hurt by a friend.
- Can I tell you about my Jesus?

**\*\*But the most powerful witness here,** I believe, is the one John, the Gospel writer, makes about the nature of God revealed in Jesus' life and behavior—and in turn, the implications this has for those who claim to follow Jesus and who seek to embody that Godly nature. For example, conventional accepted behaviors (& ritual laws) for "good Jews" stated:

- No traveling in Samaria. Well...Jesus went there.
- No eating in Samaria. Jesus did just that.
- No contact with Samaritans. Jesus did that in today's story.
- No conversations between unaccompanied women and men. Jesus did that.
- No worshipping anyplace but in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus denied that.

Over and over again Jesus defied the rigid boundaries imposed by the religious and social leaders of his time. We can look at some of what he did in a contemporary context, and some of it will bother us and maybe even make some angry, as it did the Pharisees and Sadducees, and even Jesus' own disciples. Remember Scripture tells us, when the disciples returned they were "shocked" and couldn't believe he was talking to that "kind of a woman".

That's what happens when we push against the status quo...and the social and religious norms and boundaries. So, if Jesus were alive today,

- ~He might have dinner with prostitutes and drug addicts.
- ~He might surround himself with people of poverty.
- ~He might embrace and help persons with AIDS and HIV.
- ~He might call on us to pray for Muslim terrorists.
- ~He might have no patience at all with our attempts to decide who is in and who is out, who is saved and who is lost, who is loved by God and who is not.

Well, here's the point: JESUS is alive today. And we are his body. We are his presence. We are his witness. We are called to have his mind, and to act as best we are able to discern and witness as he would. To live that Godly nature in every aspect of our life. To allow that Living Water to become a spring within,



Living Water that is gushing fountains of endless life, pouring out grace and love and hope to a hurting and needy world. To ask and take seriously the question of what would Jesus do in our time...moves us well beyond the wristbands that were so popular years ago...and into the often uncomfortable and sometimes socially unacceptable place—

Where we acknowledge that all people of all nations, all cultures, all religions, all genders, all ages, all races, all sexual orientations, all incomes, all accomplishments and all sins ARE GOD'S OWN CHILDREN AND are OUR SIBLINGS—sisters & brothers seeking the water of eternal life—that wellspring of God's love and grace from within that gushes fountains of endless life, hope and possibilities.

And that, my dear friends in Christ, is the most significant witness of all...the one *you and I* make...by daring greatly and living that Godly nature in every aspect of our life. Jesus said to an outcast so long ago, and is saying to us today, "It's who you are and the way you live that count before God."



As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have that Living Water within us...a well gushing fountains of life, of grace, love, peace and hope. We are Christ's body—witnesses called to pour out from our lives living water—so others may drink deeply, and know and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. May it be so. Amen and amen.