

# Living Waters

*A Sermon, Lessons and Prayer for March 15, 2020*

## **Gospel Lesson – John 4:5-42; The Samaritan Woman at the Well**

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

*5 So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.*

*7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."*

*16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

*27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.*

*31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."*

*39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."*

### **Sermon: Living Waters**

It truly amazes me sometimes just how territorial we can be as human beings. We find new and inventive ways to draw lines between ourselves, making distinctions and pointing out differences. For instance, take a look at our Christian denominations. Although at the heart of it all we are all worshippers of Christ, we have to name ourselves something different based on whether we baptize infants or adults, the way we take communion, and other distinctions of polity and theology. Two people long ago differed on opinions and instead of working them out and compromising, they split and formed different groups.

I confess to you that I watch televangelists from time to time, although I can't watch most of them for long! I find myself critical of them simply because they say things differently than I would as if somehow I'm some sort of authority on worship.

Over the years I've heard all kinds of stories of people leaving church because of differing opinions: arguments over decorating, the color of the carpet, outreach programs, a reference made in a sermon, hurt feelings over not getting what they wanted; you name it, I've probably heard them all. People have left for all kinds of important, but also sometimes very petty reasons. I hear stories from colleagues and we even have some in our own history here. People seem to believe somehow that their way is the only way, that they know what's right and everyone else is wrong.

The passage we encounter today in John presents to us the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman. If you pay attention throughout the Gospel journeys, you will notice that Samaritans are spoken of and referred to in a very negative light. There were several reasons for this, but the main reason was they disagreed with the Jews over where God should be worshipped – Jews said God literally lived in Jerusalem in the Holy of Holies inside the Temple while Samaritans believed God literally lived on top of Mt. Gerazim. Because of this difference they not only had nothing to do with each other, but they HATED each other with a passion. Jews believed it was in fact a SIN to interact with Samaritans.

So why in the world is Jesus talking with this woman? Doesn't he know how this looks to everyone around him?

This is the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in the entire Bible! A Samaritan woman! And what they discuss is truly important: the living waters of Christ and true worship – the Living Waters of the Spirit. Jesus says: "You worship what you do not know, we worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." Worship isn't a location, a certain

way of doing things, or about what we believe it should be, it is simply the act of God being with us, our pausing in life to recognize the gift of the Spirit alive and well within us.

We get caught up in believing that we have to do church a certain way- that it must look or feel a certain way, that it always has to have the same things, the same prayers, the same songs, that somehow we alone have found the perfect formula for how it's supposed to be done. **But as Jesus tells this Samaritan Woman through their conversation, true worship isn't about time and place, about decorations or territorial battles, it isn't even about you and me; it's about one thing and one thing only: GOD!** True worship is a gift, a gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift that we get to experience but not that we make.

**These are the Living Waters – the waters of the Holy Spirit – the waters that come to us, not that we find on our own – the waters that cleanse us and make us whole, that nourish our souls and give us peaceful rest, the waters that allow us to freely serve a God who never forsakes us, the waters that we drink of and are never thirsty again, the Living Waters of eternal life graciously given to us by God Almighty.**

The Living Waters are all around us for the Spirit of God is always with us wherever we are, whatever we do. They aren't bound to a location or a way of worshipping or even my own ideas of what is spiritual or Holy. God's Spirit finds us where we are, as sinful as we are, and by the grace and mercy of God we are all loved at the waters of redemption – the Living Waters of Christ.

AMEN.

### **Psalm of Reflection – Psalm 34**

- 1 I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- 3 O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.*
  
- 4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.  
Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- 6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,  
and was saved from every trouble.*
- 7 The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.*
- 8 O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- 9 O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.*

10 *The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

11 *Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*

12 *Which of you desires life,  
and covets many days to enjoy good?*

13 *Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.*

14 *Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.*

15 *The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their cry.*

16 *The face of the Lord is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

17 *When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,  
and rescues them from all their troubles.*

18 *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.*

19 *Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the Lord rescues them from them all.*

### **A Prayer of Peace in the Uncertain**

Holy God of Mercy and Life, who is worthy of our praise and whom we honor in our being,

**We come to you in prayer knowing you always bend your ear to listen.**

Our world is in the midst of the unknown and unique – no matter our individual thoughts about the Coronavirus, stock market, or other worries, it is clear that the world has been shaken this week.

As humans, who do not know the future and are limited, we tend to lose perspective and allow fear to foster quickly. Whether we speak it aloud or hold the concern inside our heads, it builds around us and is hard to escape.

**Today we earnestly pray for peace among the uncertain, afraid and anxious.**

We do not ever want to be a people of selfish reaction or of paralyzing fear. Instead, help us to always be a loving, calm people who rely on our faith for extra strength in this, or any, collective unknown.

**Jesus gave us the example of true faith through his life and we pray for the courage to do the same.**

As we consider the various headlines of the week, we offer our prayers -

Prayers of healing for those who have the COVID-19 virus which has no vaccine and unknown impacts, and for the many more among us who are experiencing countless other kinds of illness;

and we pray for doctors and nurses, medical staff and EMT's, firefighters and police deputies who continue to work and are exposed to all sorts of illness regularly.

Prayers of grace for those who cannot afford to be told to miss days or weeks of work and for those who will have to work anyway despite the ability to find proper care for their loved ones; and we pray for any children, families, seniors or those who are homeless who may not have access to food or necessities.

Prayers of safety of the innocents who may encounter inadvertent consequences of the heightened emotions around the globe such as abuse or slavery or abandonment.

Prayers of resilience and humble wisdom for the leaders of countries, businesses, agencies, nonprofits, churches and our homes who will continue to navigate the unknown in the coming weeks.

Prayers of closeness for the faithful who continually turn away from fear and towards the salvation of the Lord.

Prayers of love for those who weigh heavy on our hearts specifically...

Holy Spirit, you hold our prayers sacred and hear every word.

**Replace our doubts with trust and our concern with joy – for You are beside behind and in front of our every step.**

Help our community, our nation, our world, to find a path forward and perhaps a collective breath of stillness to steady the unsteady.

In the glorious name of Christ, the One who brought eternal water and redemption to a parched land in such need of grace, we offer our prayers;

**AMEN.**