

John 4:5-30, 39-42
"The Gift of God"
Third Sunday in Lent (A)

March 12, 2023
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Exhausted from His journey from Judea to Galilee, Jesus sits beside a well. There, He awaits His disciples return in bringing back food from the city. It was about noon with the sun beaming down upon Him. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well. Jesus says to her, "***Give Me a drink***" (John 4:7).

Now, Jews and Samaritans weren't exactly on speaking terms. In fact, it was customary for Jews when they traveled between Judea and Galilee to totally avoid Samaria. Not only did they not want to talk to each other, they also did not want to even see each other. Though traveling through Samaria would be the shortest route, Jews typically crossed over the Jordan River and then traveled through the Trans-Jordan territory, and then eventually cross back over the Jordan into Galilee. But Jesus and His disciples did not do that.

Instead, Jesus and His disciples did what was not customary of Jews: they traveled through Samaritan territory. This too, shocked the Samaritan woman. But Jesus is passing through Samaria for a specific purpose, a specific objective, which is that salvation is from the Jews, but is not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. But how would the whole world know of salvation, if they were never told?

Animosity is how it's been between the Jews and the Samaritans. This hostility went way, way back. When the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, they carried away most of the Israelites into exile. To replace the population, the Assyrians brought in their own people from various provinces to occupy the land. While most Israelites were exiled, many were allowed to remain. This is what caused the division. Those who remained continued to worship the true God, but they also blended in the worship of the heathen gods. So, as 2 Kings 17 says: "***The [Samaritans] feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children – as their fathers did, so they do to this day.***"

The Israelites were commanded to follow only the one true God, Yahweh. But the Samaritans gave in to the prevailing culture of the Assyrians. Instead of remaining ethnically and spiritually pure, they became a mixed people with a mixed religion. They once were with God, but now due to their false teachings, they had become lost.

So, it was indeed shocking to the Jewish people to hear that when Jesus cleansed the ten lepers, that the only man who gave thanks to Jesus was a Samaritan (Luke 17:16). That was unheard of. Samaritans had no dealings with Jews, and Jews had no dealings with Samaritans.

Equally shocking was Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Only a Samaritan cared for the half-dead traveler, who was earlier robbed, stripped of his clothing, and beaten. You would expect the priest and the Levite to help their fellow Jew, but they just passed by the half-dead man. It was the unlikely Samaritan who had compassion for the Jew as he bound up his wounds, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Jews despised Samaritans. Samaritans despised Jews. They each thought their side was right and the other was wrong. Yet, we find Jesus – *a Jew* – sitting beside Jacob's well in Samaria. Jesus is worn out. He's exhausted. Soon, a Samaritan woman comes to draw water.

For this woman, she likely thought that this was all rather odd. A Jew asking her for a drink? As odd as that may be, why is this woman coming to the well at high noon? Why would anyone come to draw water at the hottest time of the day when the sun is beating down upon you? Could it be that she wasn't welcomed to be there when the other women of the village showed up?

So, when she came up to the well, she may have been relieved to see a Jew there, because she likely thought that she would not have to deal with Him. She could just draw her water and go. But that is not what happens. Jesus speaks to her, "***Give me a drink***" (John 4:7). This was just a request for a simple act of kindness.

She was suspicious. Why is this Jew talking to me at all? Rather than give Him a drink, she says: "***How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?***" (John 4:9) She's thinking, something isn't right here. We aren't supposed to have any dealings with each other. We ignore each other. We don't talk to each other and especially, we don't ask each other for favors.

Jesus replies: "***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***" (John 4:10).

Much like Nicodemus, this woman thought Jesus was speaking in riddles. But Jesus is using His words carefully. He is being precise in His language. He wants to give her *“living water.”*

But the water is deep and Jesus has no way to draw the water! She thought Jesus was speaking of fresh, spring, bubbling water. She desired this living water.

Yet, Jesus was speaking of the sort of water that brings forth eternal life. But she was stuck on the water from the well. Where are you getting this water? You have nothing to draw water! Is this water in your pocket? Where are you getting it from?

Now, Jesus is not sitting at Jacob’s well by accident. Yes, Jesus thirsted for water. But He is sitting beside this well for a reason. As much as Jesus is thirsty, He would like to reverse this order and offer this Samaritan woman a drink. And not just any drink, but a drink that becomes a spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

As we will soon learn, this woman had a lot of baggage. She had a lot of shame. Without ever realizing it, she is quenching something, and it isn’t the water from the well. She was quenching forgiveness, since she knew she was living in sin. Instead of drawing water at a more convenient time of the day, here she is coming to draw water at the hottest time of the day. She was full of shame for what her life had become. So, when she heard that she may not ever have to do this again in the heat of the day, she was enamored. Tell me more!

But Jesus, knowing her heart says to her, *“Go, call your husband, and come here”* (John 4:16). She likely stiffens up as she admits that she has no husband. Then Jesus astounded her as He said, *“You’ve had five husbands, and the man you are now with didn’t even bother to marry you.”*

She immediately responds, *“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Where is the proper place to worship? On this mountain, or in Jerusalem?”* In other words, let’s not talk about me and my life and my aches. I can’t deal with that, so which is it, Jerusalem or here?

She attempted to hide the whole truth. She wanted to deflect the truth by changing the subject. We are just like her. We want to hide our wrongs, our faults, our failings, our shame. But God sees our whole mess. He sees our every sin. He doesn’t care how dark our life is, but He comes to seek us out in order to forgive us and make us His.

Even though we quench forgiveness, we would rather hide our sins – as if we could hide our sins from God.

Instead of exposing her on changing the subject, Jesus gladly answers her diversion. ***“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 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, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth”*** (John 4:22-24).

What Jesus is saying is this: *“You firmly believe that true worship is upon Mount Gerizim, but you are worshiping the unknown. Jews worship what is known. Despite that, the Father is seeking you. He is seeking those who will worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. It doesn’t matter the place. What matters is true worship.”*

Like the woman at the well, we, too, are also parched. Like her, we may not always realize it, but we are thirsty and quench for righteousness. This is what we really need. We need forgiveness for our sins.

And like this woman, Jesus loves you too. He has come to give us living water, which is a new spiritual life that comes to us through Holy Baptism. Like ordinary water, this “living water” in Baptism is necessary for all people since it quenches our spiritual thirst forever. We need drinking water to survive. We need living water to have eternal life. We, like the woman, were dead in our sins, but it is Jesus who is offering eternal life.

This is why we are here today and every Lord’s Day. We are here to be given His gifts, His goods! Word and Sacrament!

Jesus began His conversation at the well saying, ***“If you knew the gift of God.”*** Jesus is the gift of God. He suffered and died for the sins of the whole world. He paid for every sin. Jesus is the gift and God the Father is the giver of this gift. So, receiving what God has given is true worship. True worship isn’t at a particular place – Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem, but wherever Jesus seeks the lost.

Jesus exposed the sin in her heart and tells her that the Father is still seeking her, despite knowing all her story, to be His worshipper. Could it be? Could this man be the Messiah who is coming? ***“I who speak to you am He”*** (John 4:26).

She believed! In faith, she left her water jar to proclaim to her townsfolk: ***“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”*** (John 4:29)
All she said was “Come and see!”

She was spiritually lost, but now is found. Her fellow townsfolk were lost, but they also came to believe. Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world.

Now, the sinful world teaches that we ought to solely judge people by the color of their skin. The world teaches that in order to end racism, you must be racist. This is the doctrine of Critical Race Theory, or CRT. But how does Jesus judge? He doesn't judge by outward appearances.

For in Christ, there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, Samaritan nor Galilean, white or black, yellow or brown. Everyone is a human being, created in the image of God. He has come for everyone, because everyone needs living water, which He can only give.

Because of this, we don't see our neighbors as the world sees them. We see them how God sees them – a sinner in need of salvation. All God wants is to bring back the lost, the erring. He wants to give all the penitent “living water.”

Though we don't deserve it, Christ offers us “living water.” You see, He doesn't just leave us in our sins as the world does, which results only in eternal death. Christ offers us all forgiveness of sins. He gives us atonement through His death on the cross, so that all who believe in Him have eternal life.

Like this Samaritan woman, we know the Gift of God. We know Jesus. We know that He gives living water freely that wells up to eternal life. From one woman's testimony, a Samaritan town was converted to believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world, so there is a missional aspect to our text today as well. Through the working of the Holy Spirit in us, we are Christ's instruments in spreading the good news. So, let us be like this woman as we are also led to proclaim the Gift of God to our friends and neighbors! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +