

⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there. Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus 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"Sir," she said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water?"
¹²You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals."

¹³Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life."

¹⁵"Sir, give me this water," the woman said to him, "so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband, and come back here."

¹⁷"I have no husband," the woman answered.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say, 'I have no husband.' ¹⁸In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."

¹⁹"Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. ²³But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

Last week we met a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was smart and accomplished, but his interaction with Jesus showed us that the work of the Holy Spirit does not always connect with our human understanding. Today we meet someone else who finds herself in Jesus' path.

Jesus was facing intense pressure from the Pharisees at the time. Their anger toward him was heating up. About the same time, John the Baptist had been arrested and imprisoned. Jesus knew what was in store for him, but it was not the time. So, he and his disciples fled to Galilee. But there were three routes to Galilee. The fastest of the three routes was the one least traveled by the Jews. It led right through Samaria. The Samaritans and Jews had a lot of racial animosity toward one another, dating back a few hundred years. It would have been dangerous for Jesus and his disciples to pass through hostile territory, but as John writes in the verse right before the Gospel picks up today, "He had to go through Samaria."

Jesus and his disciples stopped at their journey through Samaria by Jacob's well. Jesus was tired from all the travel, and his disciples went into town for food. While he stood there, a woman approached the well to draw

water from it. It was about noon, right in the heat of the day, so she had come alone. Why did she come by herself? We'll find out soon. The Lord asked this woman for a drink. He was tired and probably thirsty, and she had the tools to help him. But he asked this favor for a different reason.

The Samaritan woman was taken aback. She asked, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" There must have been something about the way Jesus dressed or talked that made him stand out as a Jew to this Samaritan. She was certainly surprised that a Jew would talk to a Samaritan like her. And the fact that she was a woman would have made it even stranger. But there was something else that was going on. There was some other reason why she was so surprised that he would talk to her.

After some back-and-forth about water, which we'll talk about in a few minutes, Jesus asked the question that unlocked their entire conversation: "Go, call your husband, and come back here." What a strange question. Jesus was clearly not asking her to go get her husband as a way of demeaning her as a woman. He was asking it to take the conversation deeper with the woman.

"I have no husband," she said. Jesus responded, "You are right when you say, 'I have no husband.' In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true." What a piercing statement! We don't know what this woman's situation was, but we know it wasn't good. Did all five husbands die? She might have been labeled a widow maker, so no one wanted to marry her for fear of being number six. Did these five divorce her for some reason, maybe because she was not able to provide children? Was she a loose woman, bouncing from one husband to another? We don't know what she had been through, but we know it brought her shame. It seems she was now living with a man outside of marriage, another mark against her. Is this the reason she came to the well when she knew nobody would be there? Is this the reason she came alone?

After Jesus showed her he knew her history, she said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet." She's not running away in embarrassment. Finally, someone wasn't shunning her. Someone was willing to listen. Maybe he could help. So, she asked a religious question: "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." She was asking where true worship of God takes place. Maybe in her mind she thought, if this was a prophet of God, he'd be able to tell her how to worship to get her life back on track.

We don't know what led the Samaritan woman to this point in her life, but we know where she wound up. Her history had led her to isolation. Her history had led her to shame. And her history had led her to thirst. What was it that she thirsted after? Acceptance, forgiveness, and newness.

We come to the well today because we thirst too. The longer you live, the more you realize just how many mistakes you've made in life. We bear the scars of so many of those mistakes; people who won't return our phone calls (or maybe we're more scared that they will), memories that we just can't forget. Just like this woman, our lives are messy, and we realize all the damage we've caused in our lives. But if we've caused so much damage in our dealings with others, who are also sinful, imagine what damage it's caused with God. The prophet Isaiah writes, "No, it is your guilt that has separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden God's face from you, so that he does not hear."

Sure, we can try to ignore our shame. We can live arrogant lives where we act as if we have no regrets in life. But we all know we've got them. We can try to just embrace sin, conceding that we will never be enough for God, so we might as well live however we please. But does it work? Back to the well we keep coming, alone and embarrassed.

This woman came thirsty for water at Jacob's well, but she left with her thirst quenched from a different well. Let's rewind back to the beginning of their interaction again. Jesus asked for a drink and the woman said, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" Jesus answered, "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." If only she knew the opportunity God placed in front of her, this conversation would be going so differently. He was offering her so much more than she thought.

The Samaritan woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water? She was still thinking in worldly terms. She understood Jesus' offer not as water that brings spiritual life, but as water that is moving, or living. And if he was offering water and didn't have a bucket to get it, what secret spring did he know about? "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you?" she asked. As people watching from the sideline, we have to smirk. She's about to find out just how much greater than Jacob he is.

But she asked the right question. Who was he to make this unbelievable offer? Jesus replied, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life."

The woman was interested: "Sir, give me this water, so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." If she could get this water from Jesus, she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well all alone in the middle of the day while the townspeople stare and whisper. She could escape her shame.

But Jesus did not want her to escape her shame. He wanted her shame to be taken away. This is why he asked her about her husband, to shine a light on her messy personal life. But then came her question. She knew she was talking to a prophet. Maybe he could get her going in the right direction so that she could find her way back into God's good graces. So, she asked about where true worship is held. Jesus explained that a time was coming and was now there where true worship would no longer be confined to a single place or a single group of people. They would worship in spirit and in truth.

Then we see what had been churning inside her: "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." She was a child of the promise. She was one who looked forward to the day when God would send his Messiah into the world. All that was left to do for Jesus was tell her the truth: "I, the one speaking to you, am he." This was the drink he had offered her the whole time. And it's the drink she needed. She had come to the well beaten down by life. But this water Jesus was offering was not just going to give her the ability to hide away in shame. It would give her the acceptance, forgiveness, and newness she so desperately needed.

The same can be said for you too. For all the shame you bear, there's a drink for that. For all the anger you still carry in your heart, there's a drink for that. For your fears and anxieties and pains, there's a drink for that. Jesus quenches our thirst by giving himself. He does this for all, even for a sin-sick Samaritan woman., even for you.

Drink deeply of this living water that quenches your thirst. Know that you're not alone. As you come into God's house each week, you're surrounded by people who deal with messy lives too. Yet, you gather around the only thing that truly unites us, the truth of God's word, and encourage one another in those truths. Know that your sins are gone. Jesus came not just to explain all things, like the woman expected, but to accomplish all things. Live your life as someone who's been forgiven, who doesn't carry the guilt or sin anymore. And know you are new. You have been restored to God and to each other. Go from here this morning with joyful hearts.

So, why did Jesus have to go through Samaria? Why did he need to take the path of most resistance? He did it to proclaim salvation to this Samaritan woman, a woman so insignificant in history, her name is never mentioned. Yet, as we see her exchange with Jesus, it reminds us of how thirsty we get in life, and how our Lord provides us with living water to quench our thirst for good. Amen.