

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Text: John 4:5-26

Theme: Living Water for Thirsty Souls

John's Gospel develops the characters in the stories much more than any of the other Gospels. Especially, in Mark's Gospel we go from one quick story to the next. We never learn much about any of the people in the stories. John, on the other hand, has far fewer stories, but we learn much more about each character. Many of the stories take up an entire chapter. In John 3 we meet Nicodemus. Chapter 6 is the feeding of the 5,000. Chapter 9, which is our Gospel lesson next week deals with a man who was born blind. Chapter 11 deals with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Even the Easter stories tell us much more about people like Mary Magdelene, Thomas, and Peter.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to a Samaritan woman at a well. Like all of the other people, it was no coincidence that Jesus met this woman. It says in verse 4 that Jesus had to travel through Samaria. He had to go there to be living water for this thirsty soul.

I. Jesus made it seem as though He were in need of something.

He asked her for a drink. He sat down by the well because He was tired, and He asked the woman for a drink because He was thirsty. I understand what He was going through. When I was in Israel last fall, it was often over 100 degrees. After we toured a site for about an hour, we fled to air conditioned buildings or the bus. We never left the bus without a bottle of water. They were always empty when we returned. Jesus is human like all of us. He got tired after a long journey, a day in the hot sun made Him thirsty. Suddenly this woman came to fill her jar, and Jesus asked her for a drink.

There is another time in John's Gospel when Jesus asked for a drink. He had suffered for three agonizing hours on the cross. Earlier the soldiers offered Him some sour wine, but He refused it. Now knowing that all was finished, He said, "*I thirst.*" His intense suffering on the cross was about to claim His life, and He asked for a little comfort at the end. The soldiers came and put a sponge in some wine vinegar and pressed it to Jesus' lips.

Has Jesus ever asked you for a drink? That might seem like an odd question. In both of these cases, Jesus asked the person for help to get their attention. In our hour of need, our Lord finds a way to bring us into some kind of contact with Him. Someone asked us to help with something at church. Maybe they asked for a small favor. At first it seemed like Jesus or one of His people needed us.

II. But behind that call was a plea to come and drink from Jesus.

He was living water for the Samaritan woman. In verse 4 it says that He had to travel through Samaria. She is the reason He had to go there. When He came near Sychar, Jesus sent His disciples into town to buy food. He sat down by the well, knowing that she was about to come. When the woman arrived, He asked her for a drink. That simple request surprised her, because Jews never spoke with Samaritans. Then they entered into a lengthy conversation in which Jesus revealed that He knew everything about her. What we learn is that she was spiritually thirsty.

She was despised and rejected by everyone. Being a Samaritan, the Jews hated her. It surprised her that a Jew would ask her for a drink. She was even an outcast among her own people. The only people who showed up at the well at noon were the people who were not welcome in the morning and evening when getting water was a social time. She had been rejected by 5 husbands. At that time a woman could not divorce her husband, but 5 times men told her that they didn't want her as a wife any longer. The man she now lived with would not even give her a wedding ring. The disciples even rejected her. When they returned, they wanted to send her away.

But Jesus was there for her. He ended up revealing to her that He is the Messiah. Generally, He kept that a secret, but He offered her Living Water, which was Himself and His forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. That woman had been despised and rejected all of her life, but Jesus had to go to Samaria to meet with her. To everyone else in the world, she was nobody, but Jesus loved her and brought her salvation that day.

He was also there for those soldiers on Good Friday. He said, *"I thirst."* After Jesus received the drink from the soldiers, He told them, *"It is finished."* Then He died. In His passion, He was despised and forsaken, even by God, but He went through it all for us. It is as the prophet Isaiah writes, *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we esteemed Him not, But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by His wounds we are healed."* The soldiers heard a plea for a drink, but behind it was a bigger plea, that they would drink from Him, the living water.

He is living water for each one of us too. Have you ever been despised, rejected, and lonely? We sometimes feel as if there is no one who cares for us. We might feel like outcasts, even among our family and sometimes even among the people of God. Other people have made us feel worthless and dirty. We thirst for someone who will treat us with dignity. At other times, it is our own sins that parch us. We live in guilt because of the things that we have done. If someone would talk to us, we would be as surprised as this woman when Jesus asked her for a drink. But think of the comforting words of Jesus, *"Come unto me all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* He promises that he will never turn anyone away who comes to Him. In fact, He goes out of His way to search for us when we lose our way in sin or when we are forsaken by the world. He might not sit down at a well with us; however, He sends one of His people to us. They might not have known it, but it was necessary that they come and speak words that refreshed us in Christ. Look back at your life. Can you remember someone that God sent at just the right time who spoke the words that you needed to hear? They reminded us of God's love and their love for us in Christ.

II. Jesus sends us to those who thirst today.

He sends us to those who are lonely, forsaken, and living in guilt. The Samaritan woman went back to her village. She told them about Jesus. They had to come and see Him. They all confessed, *"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."* She became a well of living water for them as she shared Christ with them. Do you have your eyes open for people who are in need of a friend? How do you treat the person that everyone looks down on in your family, at work or at school? Do

you someone who is living in guilt? God uses us to be living water to those who are forsaken. At some time, maybe even when you didn't know it, God knew that it was necessary that you go someplace. Someone needed those words of refreshment that you could give them in Christ. God made you into a living well for someone who was spiritually parched.

This woman had no one, so it seemed. But Jesus went out of His way to find her. He asked her for a drink. In reality, it was she who needed a drink. She was parched spiritually and needed Him, the Living Water. God has His eye is on us too. He comes to us with His words and through His Supper and reminds us, *"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."* May He always refresh us with those words of the Gospel, and use us to bring comfort to those who thirst for the gift of salvation that Christ has come to bring. Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
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PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Pastor: Let us pray for the whole people of God in Jesus Christ and for all people according to their needs.

We pray for those who are lonely and forsaken, that they may find fellowship in Christ and with His people.

We pray for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that Christ will be the living water for them who washes away our sins, and quenches our thirst with His forgiveness.

We pray for all nations of the earth that in all places there may be peace. We pray for people in lands where there has been upset and strife. We pray for our own nation that it may know safety and the people may be joyful in their daily lives. We beseech You, O Lord,

We pray for all those whose labor serves us, especially those in the military, our police personnel, medical workers, and all those whose efforts support the common good. Bless their work and keep them safe.

We pray for the special concerns on our hearts today, including health and family needs, bringing to You our joys, our sorrows, and our hopes, [*including . . .*].

In this time of prayer, we remember all those who have completed their earthly journeys in faith and now rest from their labors. Lord, inspire us by the witness of the faithful from all generations, that we may complete our earthly journeys with confidence in Your gracious promises as they did in their lifetimes.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**