

Scriptures: Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-42

Water in the Bible

Last week, we heard a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. One of the things Jesus told Nicodemus was that “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit,” (John 3:5). Jesus talks a lot about water. In fact, water is a frequent image which shows up throughout the Bible. Earlier today, we heard Kaydence read the account from Exodus, of the time God told Moses to strike the rock, and water poured out for the Israelites to drink. In today’s Gospel reading, written by John, Jesus calls Himself “Living Water.”

Jesus’ word to Nicodemus, about being born of water and the Spirit gets put into application in today’s reading. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to John 4:5-42. I’m reading from the New International Version. **Read John 4:5-42.**

Today’s passage is large. It’s the bulk of the 4th chapter. We can break it down into three broad sections. Some background information for you to chew on while we consider all of what we’ve just read is this: Jesus was traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. There are two ways to get from Galilee to Jerusalem. You can travel along the banks of the Jordan River to get there. It’s nice and flat, an easy walk by foot. The other way, the route that Jesus took, carries you through hilly, mountainous country, filled with dangers from bandits and robbers. It takes you through the region of Samaria.

Of course, you know that the Jews and the Samaritans didn’t get along well. They viewed each other with suspicion. They weren’t going to compromise to try to settle an old feud that had been hundreds of years in the making. The Jews viewed the Samaritans as heathens. I can almost hear the way the Jews talked about them. “Stay away from Samaria! They don’t worship God the same way as us! They may not even worship the same God at all!” And, of course, we see in our passage a bit of a discourse from the Samaritan woman regarding what they thought of the Jews, too. We’ll come back to this in just a minute. The main point I want to make here, is that Jesus – even when the easy way is available to Him – doesn’t take it. He always takes the hard path. He chooses the way that’s most counter to our human nature to pursue.

Will You Give Me a Drink?

We’re told, “So He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give Me a drink?’” (John 4:5-7). Jesus is thirsty – the sixth hour is about noon. He’d been walking all day,

traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem through all those hills and mountains. He wants a drink. We're also told that the disciples had gone into town to buy food (verse 8).

Now I'm glad that those judgmental old Pharisees back in Jerusalem weren't around the well that day. If they would have been, I suspect they probably would have had a lot to say about the woman Jesus talked to there! "The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water,'" (verses 9-10). See friends, this particular woman had enough sense to realize that Samaritans and Jews mixed about as well as oil and vinegar. She knows they don't get along, and she's baffled as to why a Jewish man would be asking a Samaritan woman to give him a drink.

Just like Nicodemus last week, what Jesus tells her flies right over her head. "Sir," the woman said, "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" (verses 11-12). Jewish people would have never used a cup, bowl, or ladle that a Samaritan had used. Doing so might taint them. It might rub some of their Samaritan-ness on them – eewww! Cooties! We can't have that! All joking aside, we know that Jesus is in fact, greater than their father Jacob. Jesus was, is, and will always be fully God!

Give Me This Water

"Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but 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.' The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water,'" (verses 13-15). The poor old girl just doesn't get it! He's talking about the indwelling presence of His own Holy Spirit, but she thinks Jesus is talking about plain old water that you have to haul up from the bottom of a well.

This next part of the Biblical account is fascinating. There's so much to unpack in it. Jesus "told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true,'" (verses 16-18). The first thing I want to point out, which we miss when reading this story in English, is this: the original manuscripts from which we get the Gospels were written in Aramaic – that's basically Hebrew in written form – and Koine, or Common, Greek. The Greek word used here for "husband," is the same word they use for "Lord." So another way we could look at this is, when the Samaritan woman says, "I have no husband," she could be saying – and it fits the Jewish view of those heathen Samaritans very well – "I have no Lord."

I have to admit, I chuckled this week when I was reading this, and the issue of this lady with five former husbands, and now living with this other guy. An old song of the Beach Boys came to mind, *I Get Around*. Are you familiar with that song? Well, you have to change the lyrics just a bit to make it fit the Samaritan woman, but you get the point. She got around.

And Jesus, in His gentle way, just speaks truth to her. He sees her. How she's lived. What wrong she's done. Notice here – and we would be wise to follow His example – He doesn't tell her she's a worthless sinner. He just lets her know that He knows, and that He sees her current situation. "The man you now have isn't your husband, what you've said is very true." Now that's a wake-up call for this woman. "Sir," she says, "I can see that You are a prophet," (verse 19). She then goes into asking some questions of Jesus about what it means to truly worship, and shows some of those stereotypes that Samaritans had towards the Jews that we started to talk about a little bit ago.

But You Jews

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews" and this is directed to all Jews, not Jesus in particular, "claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem," to which Jesus replied, "Believe Me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks," (verses 20-23). There was a mutual dislike between the Samaritans and the Jews, I hope you're able to recognize that. Look what Jesus is doing, though. He's telling her that God wants people who worship Him – without regard to any label we as humans may attempt to put on them.

Jesus tells us this, when He says, "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth," (verse 24). See friends, He's all about breaking down barriers. He's all about bringing those who are marginalized on the fringes into the presence of a restored and reconciled society through Himself. It's about the relationship we have with God – and others – through the on-going, continuous work of our Risen Savior, who even now intercedes in our behalf at the throne of God.

What we find next is that the woman's heart is softening through her contact with Jesus. "I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us," (verse 25), she says. Jesus responds, "I who speak to you am He," (verse 26). This is a high point in the story. Christ has revealed Himself to a woman who, up to this point, had been lost in sin. Jesus was physically thirsty and asked for a drink of water, and used this very basic human need for refreshment to minister to the lost soul of a woman, who had apparently measured the value of herself by being in relationship with

a male. There are women out there today – you probably have some in your family – who think they have to have a man, any man, in their life to be complete. The same could be said to men, right? You don't need some other person to make you a whole person – only Jesus does that. He completes us.

The disciples return, the woman runs off, leaving her jar, and tells every person she sees, "Come see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (verse 29). That took guts on her part. Look, everyone in the town knew what this woman was like. People probably had a low view of her. Sometimes people take a low view of us, too, when they find out things we've done in our past – and they can be quick, and quite happy – to point out our shortcomings and indiscretions. Yet we see Jesus talking with this particular woman. He gives her the "time of day," even when other people, perhaps even former husbands, wouldn't. We're next told that the people came from the town to find Jesus (verse 30).

Reaping a Harvest

At this point, for whatever reason, John's narrative switches into a recording of the disciples wanting Jesus to eat something, and Him telling them that He "has food they know nothing about," (verses 31-32, paraphrased). Jesus goes on to tell them that His food is of the spiritual sort – to do the will of the Father – and tells them that "the fields are ripe for harvest," (verse 35), and that various people are involved in it. There's something to be said about this sub-story within the larger narrative, which is also just as applicable today. For too long we've gotten complacent – comfortable, even downright lazy – in the Church.

Sometimes people have an unrealistic expectation of the Church meeting their needs. We find community in the Church. We find fellowship in the Church. These are things we find, to be sure. But the ways in which those look, going from church to church are radically different. Some churches – you, New Hope – are very good with hospitality. When we have celebrations of life for members who go home to receive their eternal reward, like our brother, Larry Slagle – you come out, you show up, and you make those families feel the strong arms of Jesus Christ holding them up in the fellowship and meal you provide. I know you'll do that again on this Tuesday afternoon and evening – there's no doubt in my mind about it.

In other areas, though, we've got some work to do. Last week I asked you to complete a survey on various programming options. One of those areas was in regards to Junior Church. My view of Junior Church tends to differ from others. I've always thought that if I sent my kids out from our worship service, I was giving them the message that I didn't want them in here with me. I realize that's not how other people view it, and that's okay. It's good to have different perspectives – it's how we challenge and help each other grow into maturity. Maybe our worship time isn't the place for younger children. Perhaps they need something geared to their level of understanding

during our worship service time to be held in a classroom, free from distractions. The nursery is intended for mothers and infants. It's not a learning environment. By the time they're in preschool, they aren't here to play, they should be here learning to worship Jesus. Several surveys indicated that this was a top priority. And so, I imagine when we get to talking through the details in the coming weeks, that we will have multiple volunteers stepping up to help with the harvesting of that age group.

We want to reap a harvest – these young people need to be pruned. You've all made a commitment at their baptisms that you'd help them grow. So we need to be people of integrity. We need to keep our word and our commitments – to and with each other. Because friends, God is faithful, even when we are not – but He calls us now to be faithful as He is. If we're following Jesus, we need to honor the promises we've made to each other.

She was a Willing Messenger; He was Willing to Use Her

At the end of our passage today, John switches back to the Samaritan woman. "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when they came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, '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,'" (verses 39-42). Friends, our Savior has uniquely poised us to be used as His blessing to the surrounding community and neighbors – right here where we're planted – on the corner of Mason and Patterson-Halpin Roads. He wants us to be workers – harvesters – reaping what others sowed before us, planting new shoots to be left behind when we're no longer even remembered. The only way we do that, is to be like the Samaritan woman.

She was a sinner – she fully knew every one of her shortcomings and indiscretions – so did Jesus. But she was willing to carry His message. He was willing to use her to carry His message into the village that day. And in doing it, that entire community was changed. Christ was made known. People believed. We've all fallen short. He'll use us, if we let Him. Christ has blessed us with great potential here. Friends, we just need to become the change we'd like to see in this corner of the world, and we do that by being willing servants who faithfully follow what we're called to do by our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Redeeming God, our goal and guide, You go before and await our coming. Only our thirst compels us beyond complaint to conversation, beyond rejection to relationship. Pour Your love into our hearts, that, refreshed and renewed, we may invite others to the living water given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.