

WORDS OF LIFE

“Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.”

John 4:4-26

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March 15, 2020

What’s your greatest need or desire today? Peace and security as you deal with the effects of the current health crisis? A sense of loss and frustration over activities and events that have been cancelled and plans that are now on hold? Thinking beyond the immediate fallout surrounding the coronavirus, do you need a new job; more money so you can...; healing from sickness or relief from an ongoing condition; or an improved relationship with your spouse, child or co-worker?

You’re smart people and we’re in church, so I bet some of you are a step ahead of me. If you’re thinking, *“What I identified as my greatest need is probably not my true need,”* you’re right. In a moment we’ll be looking at Jesus’ encounter with a woman who came to a well to draw water. She came for water, but Jesus identified a greater need. The woman left the well without water, but her deepest need was fulfilled.

In the Old Testament we read about God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt. After 400 years in Egypt—where they were held as slaves—God delivered his people from their oppression. He parted the Red Sea and led them across on dry ground and when Pharaoh’s army tried to follow them, the waters rolled back into place and drowned the Egyptians. After this amazing miracle of deliverance, God fed his people with manna that fell from heaven and quail that landed in their camp. God’s provisions were plentiful, but when his people faced adversity they were quick to complain and express fear that they were going to die of starvation or thirst. In Exodus chapter 17 we see another instance where the Israelites complained to God about their need for basic sustenance. I’ll read verses 1-7 of chapter 17:

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Exodus 17:1-7

God answered the complaints of his people by giving them water to drink from a rock. He could have supplied water via an underground stream or river that suddenly bubbled to the surface or by a torrential downpour, but instead He gave them fresh water from a rock. He reiterated a truth that He had communicated to them time and time again—He was their provider. In giving them water in this way, God wanted to help them steer clear of thinking that nature or their own ingenuity or Moses’ excellent leadership was meeting their needs. He wanted them to understand He was their provider.

This example of God providing water for his people foreshadows an encounter Jesus had with a Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. It was in this encounter with a Samaritan woman that Jesus spoke the words of life we’re focusing on today, *“Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.”*

During Lent we’re studying Jesus’ words of life—words Jesus spoke in the Gospels in which He used natural reality to convey spiritual truth. So far, we’ve explored the statements, *“Man shall not live on bread alone”* and *“You must be born again.”* Bread and birth are common ideas, but Jesus used these familiar concepts to explain profound spiritual truth, and in John chapter 4 He does the same thing with water—infusing a natural concept with deep spiritual truth. I’ll begin reading at verse 4 of John chapter 4.

John 4:4-8

Now he had to go through Samaria. 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 noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

No self-respecting Jew chose to go through Samaria—there were ways around it that didn't risk contamination with the despicable Samaritans. The Samaritans were viewed as wanna-be Jews. They had intermarried with Gentiles and they had the nerve to encourage their people to worship in Samaria, instead of going to the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus had to go through Samaria, because He was on a mission. It was noon and his disciples went into town to buy food while Jesus rested by the local well. As He was resting, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Coming to the well at noon was unusual. Carrying a jug full of water was hard work and women generally went to the well early in the morning or in the evening when the day was cool. We learn later that this woman was a town outcast who presumably came to the well at noon, because she didn't want to interact with the women of the town. When He saw the woman, Jesus asked her for a drink. His request, while seemingly harmless, was culturally inappropriate on several levels. First, Jews and Samaritans didn't speak to each. Secondly, women and men didn't converse in public settings. But Jesus' engaging this woman in conversation shouldn't surprise us, He often acted in unorthodox ways.

The woman responded to Jesus' request for a drink with these words, ***"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.)*** She understood how inappropriate it was for this man to speak with her. 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."*** Jesus didn't try to explain the feud between Jews and Samaritans or try to defend why the Jews had it right and the Samaritans were misguided. He didn't allow Himself get sidetracked. I'll continue Jesus and the Samaritan woman's exchange by readings verses 11-15 of John 4:

"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 livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them 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." John 4:11-15

Jesus and the Samaritan woman went back and forth in their dialogue. Like Nicodemus, whom we looked at last week, she was having trouble understanding that Jesus wasn't talking about wet, cool liquid. Jesus tried to offer some clarity by saying the water He gives keeps people from thirsting, but she still didn't understand. So, Jesus tried another tack, beginning in verse 16:

He 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 just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," 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 the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

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

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." John 4:16-26

The idea of living water wasn't connecting with this woman, so Jesus tried a direct, personal approach—He asked the woman to bring her husband to Him. And her response helps the reader understand why this woman is at the well alone at noon when the sun's heat could be almost unbearable. She was viewed by the self-respecting people in her community as a "*sinful woman*." She had been married 5x and was now living with a man who wasn't her husband. But Jesus wasn't thrown off by her admission. He continued to take her conversation and turn it toward spiritual truth and his identity as the Messiah.

This story has an amazing ending. The disciples returned and wondered, "*What in the world is Jesus doing talking to a Samaritan woman?*" The woman left her water jar—the reason she had come to the well in the 1st place—and went back to her town to tell everyone that she had met a man who was the Messiah. Women in that culture weren't viewed as reliable witnesses and especially not women with a lifestyle as sordid as hers, but when she told the people of the town what had occurred, many of them placed their faith in Jesus. These new

believers came out to Jesus and urged Him to stay with them. He stayed for two days and taught them and many of them became believers.

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well was powerful—not only did she believe in Him, but many of the townspeople did as well. But I want us to focus on Jesus' statement, ***“Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.”*** Jesus' physical thirst, a well and a woman with a jug and scoop to draw water formed the setting for these words, but Jesus wasn't talking about the cool, clear, wet liquid we drink. His statement highlights the truth that He is our provider and when we drink the water He provides us, our needs will be met.

Each week during this series I'm asking someone from our church to share what these words mean to them. We're doing this to help each of us apply these truths to our lives. Today I've asked Dennis Weller to share with us.

Listen to the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 95, which point back to God bringing water from the rock for the Israelites:

Psalm 95

**Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.**

**For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.**

**Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.**

Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. verses 1-9

As we move to our time of response, I echo the question Dennis asked, ***“What's God saying to you?” “What is He saying to you about your thirst or about his provision?”***