

John 4:5-26
3rd Sunday in Lent
“The Cross Is...”

March 15, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Have you ever considered how important water is for daily life? It is the most abundant resource in the planet. The surface of the earth and our human bodies have similar proportions of it. But have you ever considered how important it is? And I mean really considered it. More than after some hard work in the yard or garden or after a workout. Have you considered its importance in your daily life just sitting around reading the newspaper or watching your favorite show?

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus appears to be slightly dehydrated. It doesn't say that specifically. But our Lord, fully God, and also fully human was sitting beside a well, wearied after His journey. And a woman comes up to fetch water. He asks her for a drink, and a conversation unfolds.

He has no bucket, no vessel to drop into the well. So, He asks a woman for some help. She doesn't understand. Why would someone come to a well with nothing to get the water out? And, somehow recognizing that He is a Jew, she doesn't understand why He is even talking to her, a Samaritan. After all, Jews and Samaritans don't get along.

There is a dispute, centuries old, going back to the time that the Temple was rebuilt. ^(Ezra & Nehemiah) The Samaritans who had intermarried with the other nations were cut off from Israel. Only the pureblood Jews were allowed in the rebuilding of the Temple. The Samaritans were cast aside. The Jews considered themselves to be elite and didn't deal with Samaritans. They even avoided going into Samaritan territories.

But here Jesus is, talking with the woman about water, asking for a drink. And in the course of the conversation, He steers the topic from the physical to the metaphysical, the spiritual. In the previous chapter the same thing happened. We heard about Nicodemus last week, a Jew of Jews, a Pharisee who is striving to worship Yahweh. Many would consider Nicodemus to be the cream of the crop in that culture. And Jesus takes time out of His day to talk to Nicodemus when he approaches. But Nicodemus just doesn't understand what Jesus is saying, at least not at first.

Today we see Jesus seeking out a Samaritan woman, who also worships Yahweh in a different way, in a different location. She is certainly not the cream of the crop in that culture. She is a Samaritan. She is a woman. She is a known adulteress having had several husbands and now shacking up with some guy. Any one of these qualities would be enough for a respectable teacher to pass her by. But Jesus doesn't. Instead He seeks her out. He knows exactly what she is and what she isn't, yet still seeks her out. And she isn't understanding what Jesus is saying either, at least not at first.

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,” Jesus says. **“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

Her response is similar to Nicodemus' response. She is focused on the physical because she doesn't get it yet. **“give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come to draw water.”** All she hears in Jesus' words, at first, is that she isn't going to have to go to the well. She isn't going to have to come out in the heat of day, making herself even more thirsty simply by the action of gathering what will quench her thirst. But Jesus isn't talking about that kind of water, just like Jesus wasn't talking about the kind of birth that Nicodemus was thinking about. Jesus is talking about spiritual provision from God.

Several years ago, I saw an article online saying that there was a sudden spike in the number of people being treated for dehydration during a heatwave, especially in the cities that reached 100+ temperatures. Similar articles surface on various news outlets and medical blogs almost every year. And they all say about the same thing. An estimated 75% of Americans are living in a constant state

of dehydration. They simply don't drink the recommended amount to remain healthy.

Oh, people will drink a lot of stuff during the day. But the problem isn't the amount of fluids. It's the type of fluids. We tend to drink a lot of things that are mildly dehydrating. Sugary drinks such as soda/pop and even fruit juices, caffeinated beverages such as coffee & tea. All of them are mildly dehydrating. And then there is the population that is old enough to drink alcoholic beverages which are extremely dehydrating. Even sports drinks which are meant to rehydrate and restore electrolytes are no substitute for good ol' fashioned H₂O.

Experts say that by the time you feel thirsty and realize it, you are already dehydrated. And the worst part is that people don't know they are dehydrated. They often don't feel the difference because they are in this constant state of dehydration so they don't know what it feels like to be properly hydrated. So along come the experts telling us what we really need—water and lots of it.

According to Barna research, only 25% of respondents from all backgrounds across America are considered "practicing Christians" in 2020, meaning that only 25% of our population has attended church at least once per month. And that is setting the bar pretty low. But what that means is that even with that low standard, 75% of Americans who are nominally Christian or non-Christian are living in a constant state of spiritual dehydration. And again, the problem is that they don't know what it feels like to be properly spiritually hydrated. They don't know what it feels like to have the life-giving water of God's Word as a regular part of their lives.

Oh, they'll drink lots of other things—sweet fizzy self-help seminars, stimulating and so-called "eye-opening" philosophies from religions around the globe. And then there are the mind-numbing lies that "everyone is basically good" and "if there is even an afterlife, everyone would get in." Some of these drinks are mildly spiritually dehydrating. Some of them are extremely dehydrating. There is no substitute for spiritual H₂O.

And that life-giving water is poured out from the cross. Only in this Gospel, the Gospel of John does Jesus cry out, "**I thirst.**" ^{John 19:28} As He hung on the cross, He was cut off from heaven, becoming the thirsty one in our place, longing for life, bearing our suffering, enduring our shame. And then they pierced Him. And blood and water flowed. Jesus entered the depths of Hell itself as He hung on the Cross, cut off from the Father in our place, in order that He might give us His eternal, life-giving stream. The cross of Jesus Christ is the well of life-giving water.

Today He brings that water to you. Whether you feel like the cream of the crop or the lowest of the low, He offers you to drink deeply of His Word of forgiveness. But you already know that. That is why you are here, to be refreshed each week with the only water that gives eternal life. The problem is, we tend to want to hoard our supply of water while there are other people who are extremely dehydrated. Outside of these walls is a desert. Yes, there is physical desert around us, but there is also a spiritual desert.

The woman at the well was given a drink of refreshing, life-giving water, straight from the source. And she was brought to realize that she previously was dehydrated. Right afterward she went and shared that water with others. Through her word of her interaction with the Messiah, they also received life-giving water and came to realize their dehydration. And then also they were drawn to the Source.

We can follow the example of this lowest-of-the-lows woman. We know that apart from Christ, we are parched. And we know the same is true for others. So our mission is to share that life-giving water. As we hear God's Word each week, we are refreshed. His grace, His blessing, His forgiveness is poured into us to the point that we are overflowing. We don't have to worry about running out. The well is deep. The well won't run dry.

The season of Lent is almost halfway over. Now is the perfect time for us to follow the Samaritan woman's example. As we get closer to Holy Week and Easter let's go out to the community and offer others to drink from the Gospel. "**Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did?**" "Come, hear about a man who did everything for me." Amen.