

Thirsty

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash

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SCRIPTURE READING

John 4:1-29

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’—² although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common 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.’ ¹¹The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ ¹³Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ ¹⁵The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ ¹⁷The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ ¹⁹The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ ²¹Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ ²⁵The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ ²⁶Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ ²⁸Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’

I spun around flinging water on people in every direction.

The church I served at the time had an Epiphany tradition of 'asperges.' The pastor dipped a pine branch in the baptismal font and splashed the whole congregation - a reminder of our baptisms - a reminder of grace. The waters of God's love raining down on our heads.

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Prayer

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He was tired.

Jesus was tuckered out. Worn down. Exhausted. (This Lent we are remembering that Jesus got that way, too.) On this day, in the noon heat, he sat down to rest by the well. It wasn't the right place to rest at noon day, but

He was thirsty.

Jesus was parched. Dry as dust. His mouth was cotton. And,

He was vulnerable.

He was alone. He said to his friends, y'all go on into town and bring food back. I'm just going to wait here. In the high sun. With no bottle or bucket. In a dry land where people die of thirst. Surely someone will come along.

He knew someone was about to come along.

He saw that

She was tired.

She was tired of coming to the well when no one else would be there. Do not think you know her story, by the way. Preachers have judged her for two thousand years based on assumptions that are not in the text.^[1] But Jesus did not judge. He just met her, understood her, saw her.

He saw that she was thirsty.

She went to the well every day. It is hard work finding enough water in a desert.

We have been taught by our Cambodian friends just how hard it is to draw good safe drinking water. We know how dangerous it is to cross the wilderness in thirst. We know how tired our neighbors in Flint and Jackson have been, carrying water every day. There in Sychar, the Samaritan woman was thirsty.

He saw that she was vulnerable.

She was tired, thirsty and alone. Whatever her story, she was vulnerable - tired, thirsty and alone. Give me this water, she asked.

She thought she was asking a stranger for literal water - but Jesus was no stranger and he offered her so much more - grace, understanding, belonging, and then she asked:

Wash me with this grace, fill my cup with this belonging. Reveal the spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

"Salvation begins with clear, tender, and unconditional seeing," writes Debie Thomas.^[2]

Jesus flings God's love around with the joy of a child at river's edge - splashing mercy and sustenance as if it were limitless, which it is -

limitless
unboundaried
overflowing

He knew her story and invited her to meet God, not on this mountain or in that Temple but in Spirit and Truth.^[3]

At Jacob's well, his friendship renewed her.

His living water quenched her thirst.

She moved from vulnerability to strength in the gushing up of living water.

And she

told the people of Sychar -

that is to say, she spoke the Word^[4] (in the beginning was the Word, and she spoke of it - it's there in the Greek)

she told the people of Sychar,

from whom she had hidden for so long

that she had found living water.

Were they thirsty, too?

She wondered, could this be the Messiah?

Come and see, she said.

She drew them to the well of Living Water where their thirst was quenched - John says the people were so convinced by this outcast outsider's wondering they spend two days learning from Jesus. Living water raining down.

Are we searching for the well? What is living water to us?

Do we yearn for an oasis in the desert?

For a fountain,

A cleansing bath,

A summer rain

A waterfall,

The baptismal font

Overflowing love?

Living water is unboundaried grace, unconditional love.

"God's grace is as diffuse as the waters, rippling within the cellular life of our world. We can't extract ourselves from water and we can't separate ourselves from God's care. We are as reliant on grace as our bodies are on water."^[5]

Living water is blessing.

Living water is the cup of promise, poured out for each of us.

"Water conducts divinity."^[6]

Are you tired?

Are you thirsty?

Are you vulnerable?

Come and see, the woman invites us.

Come to me, Jesus says to us, come to me all you who are weary and burdened. Those who drink of this water will never thirst.

Come and see...

And take a drink
of living water.

Do you see someone tired? Do you see someone thirsty? Do you see someone vulnerable?

Our call is to meet them at the well,

Fill a bucket for them, too,

Spin around joyfully with them,

Splashing,

The waters of God's love raining down on all of our heads.

Amen.

[1] To read more on this point - The New Interpreter's Bible, The Women's Bible Commentary, and Fred Craddock, March 7, 1990 - among others.

[2] <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2561-the-woman-at-the-well-2>

[3] Fred Craddock, Christian Century March 7, 1990.

[4] Fred Craddock points out the relationship between John 1 and John 4 in his commentary in Christian Century March 7, 1990.

[5] Isaac Villegas, Christian Century, March 2023.

[6] Lisa M. Wolfe, Christian Century, March 2023