

## John 4:5-26

<sup>5</sup>So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the piece of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there. Then Jesus, being tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

<sup>7</sup>A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus 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."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," she said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water?" <sup>12</sup>You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his animals."

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life."

<sup>15</sup>"Sir, give me this water," the woman said to him, "so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

<sup>16</sup>Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband, and come back here."

<sup>17</sup>"I have no husband," the woman answered.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say, 'I have no husband.' <sup>18</sup>In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."

<sup>19</sup>"Sir," the woman replied, "I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But a time is coming and now is here when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ). "When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

<sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

## Living Water

### I.

Perhaps these days civic pride is found in whether or not the local high school sports teams do well, or whether there is festival people from all over flock to enjoy, or whether the job market in the area is booming and attracting people to move in to participate. That's what happens when a population is so mobile. There aren't many people, especially in larger communities, who have lived in the same little area for generations.

That wasn't the case for this woman. Her ancestors had likely lived right nearby for many generations. Perhaps from time to time they had been forced to move away due to circumstances beyond their control, but they had always come back home when the time was right. When they came back, others had occupied the region. They intermarried, and the races had mixed together for so long that they had developed their own unique culture.

The proud history of the little town had been maintained, however. The woman was proud of her little town's history. The well outside of town had been the main source of water for the region for 2,000 years. Jacob himself, the grandson of Abraham, had instigated the digging of that well.

Everyone had to go to the well to get their water. It was a daily chore. Going about that chore, on this particular day, a man was sitting near the well when she arrived. She could tell that he was a Jew, a foreigner here in Samaria.

“Give me a drink” (John 4:7, EHV), the man said. That was the first shock of her day, with more to come. “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9, EHV).

Let’s back up a little bit before we go on. The verse right before today’s Gospel said of Jesus: “He had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4, EHV). “Had to.” Not “decided to.” Why did Jesus “have to” go through Samaria? Was it perhaps for this very encounter? Was it, perhaps, because many Samaritans would be led to faith in him by this and other contacts? Was it, perhaps, to show his disciples, and the Samaritan woman and the other residents of her town—and us—that he came for more than just the Jews?

When the woman wondered how it could be that Jesus asked *her*, a Samaritan, for a drink, Jesus replied: “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” (John 4:10, EHV).

This discussion was getting more complicated and more confusing by the moment. This guy had just asked *her* for a drink; now he was saying *she* should have asked him right back and he would give her “living water.” What was this living water? If he needed to ask for a drink of regular water, how could he possibly *get* this special water she had never heard of before? She called his bluff. “Sir, give me this water...so I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:15, EHV).

“Jesus told her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back here.’<sup>17</sup> ‘I have no husband,’ the woman answered. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say, “I have no husband.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true’” (John 4:16-18, EHV).

Do you know one of the most unique, annoying characteristics of a small town? Everybody knows everybody else’s business. But this was a shocker. This man wasn’t from around here. All the locals might know everything about her life, but there was no way this stranger could have known her whole life’s history.

With this abrupt turn of the conversation, Jesus was changing the whole encounter into a theological discussion. It started with the law.

While the woman might be proud of her town and its heritage, she wasn’t really all that proud of her own life. Having her sins brought up so abruptly must have given her quite a start. “<sup>19</sup> ‘Sir,’ the woman replied, ‘I see that you are a prophet’” (John 4:19, EHV). It was time to change the subject. She didn’t really want to talk about her past.

## II.

Would you like to talk about your past? Are you proud of every moment in your life? Could one sentence about something you have done make you want to change the subject?

While there are some who brag about their criminal activity on social media, most people tend to cherry-pick the things they post. It’s the good times and the happy moments that predominate. Perhaps some posts are designed to garner a little sympathy, but most people don’t mention the things they are embarrassed about.

Today’s First Reading from Exodus 17 had the children of Israel grumbling about the lack of water. Their thirst was really just another way for them to grumble about God’s blessings to them. Clearly God hadn’t been good enough to them. He hadn’t given them what they wanted, when they wanted it, or enough of it. Water was just the latest thing to come up in their complaints. The reading ended by saying: “They tested the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’” (Exodus 17:7, EHV). That cuts to the heart of the matter. The people of Israel were dissatisfied with God.

That cuts to the heart of *our* spiritual condition, too. Whether or not Jesus specifically calls out your particular sin, you and I have a dissatisfaction with God. We want what we want, when we want it, and as much of it as we want. When God’s blessings don’t flow in exactly the way we want them to flow, we complain. We echo the woman in the gospel: “Sir, give me this water...so I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:15, EHV). All too often we focus

on physical things when we look to Jesus. It would be so nice if he would just make this life a little easier.

Recognizing Jesus as a prophet, the woman said: “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews insist that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20, EHV). Her people were constantly criticized for choosing Mt. Gerizim as the place for their worship, while the Jews insisted the only correct place was Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. Was it possible for her to find forgiveness for her past? Where would such forgiveness be possible?

### III.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews’” (John 4:21-22, EHV). Jesus did not dredge up the woman’s past, or her present life, to shame her. He wanted to give her the living water he had mentioned to get this religious discussion started.

“The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (the one called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘I, the one speaking to you, am he’” (John 4:25-26, EHV). *That* put a whole new context on this “living water” Jesus had offered. He was the Messiah! He was the One who had long been promised!

Not even a Samaritan woman with a checkered past was outside his reach or his concern. He had already offered her the living water. She knew from that that he obviously cared about *her*.

That verse before today’s Gospel said: “[Jesus] had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4, EHV). There are no people outside God’s plan of forgiveness. He had to go because he wanted this woman to know he came for her. He wants you to know that there are no outcasts outside his concern. He came also for you.

He *had* to go. Jesus once again committed himself to the road that led to the cross. He had to go and tell this woman that he was her living water. He would go to the cross and pay for all those sins of her past.

“If you knew the gift of God...you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water... <sup>14</sup>whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life” (John 4:10, 14, EHV). Jesus is *your* living water, too. He has gone to the cross to pay for all the sins of your past—and your present—too. He has sent the Holy Spirit to you in baptism to give you the living water of faith in the work he already accomplished for you at the cross.

Your sins—no matter how vile—do not make you an outcast. Jesus has come to be your living water.

### IV.

Just after today’s text, John writes: “Then the woman left her water jar and went back into town. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>‘Come, see the man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ <sup>30</sup>They left the town and came to him” (John 4:28-30, EHV). Sometimes the most unique, annoying characteristic of a small town can work to your advantage. Since everyone knows everybody else’s business, everyone understood right away that the woman meant that Jesus had known about her past and had told her something special. They all wanted to learn the same thing.

Evangelism happens in unusual ways, doesn’t it? Many of Jesus’ disciples were very simple fishermen, but they went on to preach and teach about Jesus powerfully. A Samaritan woman with a checkered past caused her whole town to drop everything they were doing to go learn more about Jesus.

What’s your story? You don’t have to speak to a stadium full of people to tell others about Jesus. You don’t have to stand in this pulpit to do it, either. God has perfectly positioned *you* to be someone who can proclaim the salvation Jesus came to bring to all. You can share with others the living water of Jesus. Amen.