



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Come to the Well” John 4:1-42; Galatians 5:22-25

Most of the sermons this month have had a “water” theme to them, leading up to today, when we meet the Woman at the Well. The “thought for worship” that I printed today to help you get ready for this, invited you to ask God to help you remember your greatest thirst. Do you have a memory in mind?

For me, deep thirst is not a sensation like you see in the movies. In fact, as I become truly dehydrated, I get slow and dull, and I can get muscle cramps and feel like I want to throw up. For lesser thirsts, I still don’t have a sensation, I just start looking around for something to drink. California would mostly be a desert had not the earlier pioneers collected and re-directed that precious water. Life ends without water. The Mars probes and landers are now focused on searching for water on THAT planet, as a way to confirm the guess about life there, sometime.

Americans have become very water-conscious over the last 20 years. We are demanding higher standards of purity in our drinking water. We spend some huge amount—was it \$200 billion?—on bottled water—the big bottles for water coolers, and the individual bottles for carrying around. I bring a reusable water bottle with me every Sunday. We’re told we need a full 8 glasses of water a day, even if we’re working inside. Water is life.

But there’s thirst, and there’s thirst. This morning’s Bible passage is a story most of us know, and yet we keep learning from it. Open your Bibles with me to John 4:1-42—yes, almost the whole chapter. I’m going to read it from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase he called, *The Message Bible*. And then I want to let this woman speak for herself. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. [text]

Jesus realized that the Pharisees were keeping count of the baptisms that he and John performed (although his disciples, not Jesus, did the actual baptizing). They had posted the score that Jesus was ahead, turning him and John into rivals in the eyes of the people. So Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee.

To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, “Would you give me a drink of water?” (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, “How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” (Jews in those days wouldn’t be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, “If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.”

The woman said, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this ‘living water’? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?”

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”

The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

He said, “Go call your husband and then come back.”

“I have no husband,” she said.

“That’s nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough.”

“Oh, so you’re a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

“Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God’s way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”

“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?" And they went out to see for themselves.

In the meantime, the disciples pressed him, "Rabbi, eat. Aren't you going to eat?"

He told them, "I have food to eat you know nothing about."

The disciples were puzzled. "Who could have brought him food?"

Jesus said, "The food that keeps me going is that I do the will of the One who sent me, finishing the work he started. As you look around right now, wouldn't you say that in about four months it will be time to harvest? Well, I'm telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at what's right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It's harvest time!

"The Harvester isn't waiting. He's taking his pay, gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to harvest a field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others."

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Savior of the world!"¹

If we were in a Bible study, I would go through all the background in this passage, to really make it stand out for us. I'll just point out a couple of things that grabbed me this time through, that I had not seen before.

John the gospel writer puts in some notes at several points in his account, to help us get in touch with Jesus' thinking, or to help us understand what's going on. At the start of his chapter four, there's this narrative comment about the Pharisees noting that Jesus' Team (really, it was his disciples, not Jesus himself) was baptizing even more people than John the Baptizer! (In the gospels, when the Pharisees notice something, it probably isn't going to be good!) They had already been curious--and some were alarmed--about John. He was a wild man, living off the land like some reincarnation of a prophet from the Hebrew Scriptures the Pharisees knew so

¹Peterson, E. H. (2002). *The Message : The Bible in contemporary language* (John 4:1-42). Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress.

well. Scary! And this baptism thing. Jews rarely saw a baptism, because that was reserved for people converting to Judaism from some other religion. John the Baptizer was warning the people that a cosmic change was coming, that all those who just “played at” being believers needed to repent and clean up their act, for judgment was coming! Nothing cleans up like water—so baptism was John’s thing, washing the outside with water as a symbol of the repenting and new life the washee in also undergoing. Jesus and his disciples seemed to come along and perform the same ministry, but the crowds coming to Jesus’ Team were even larger than those coming to the one everyone called “The Baptist” and his Team. *What is going on here?*, the Pharisees wondered.

Jesus does not want to get into some popularity contest that puts him in competition with John and his ministry. So Jesus just leaves; he takes off for the northern part of the country—Galilee, his base of ministry.

But I cannot let this pass without making sure you underline that little piece in verse 2, where it says the disciples were doing the baptizing. **THEY** were doing it. Almost from the get-go, Jesus has his disciples doing “the holy stuff”. They are the hands of God, washing and receiving people who want to come to God. They are “just laypeople”! And isn’t that what you are, too? I know perhaps two others here are ordained in some church, but not the rest of you. Are you involved with Jesus in doing ministry? Even though you don’t understand everything, even if you haven’t had training or much experience? Could we be missing something, by reserving the “holy things” for “the hired holy men”?

We’ve got to more on. Virtually all the versions of verse 4 say, “He had to pass through Samaria”—John’s notes again.

No, Jesus didn’t have to go through Samaria. In fact, because of the centuries-old animosity and prejudice between Jews in the South and Samaritans in the North, any Jew loyal to their faith would take the time and trouble to go all the way around Samaria, so as not to put a foot on Samaritan soil. Now, that’s really hard core hatred, like used to be said of the Irish—short tempers and long memories. (Thank God for the peace that has come to Ireland! We need to keep praying for them, as they work their way back toward one nation, again.)

There are many other notes John inserts, but I want you to skip to verse 39. John notes, “Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman’s witness: ‘He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!’” Her enthusiasm for Jesus overflows—that’s the Living Water at work! And it’s contagious. She doesn’t have to plot and plan how to evangelize; she just can’t wait to give away what she’s got—to anyone!

I used to call this woman, “Much-married Mary.” But before she meets Jesus, I think we should call her, “Dry-hearted Donna.” I want us to experience this woman’s thirst. Preston found this terrific video on YouTube in which an actress takes a first-person perspective of this woman. She speaks rapidly, sometimes rapping her lines with rhymes, so you’ll have to listen closely.

Let’s meet Dry-Hearted Donna. *[video]*

[alternate—story of the well pump and the canteen]

It’s people who are dry who really want the Living Water that Jesus provides. A lot of people around us are pretty self-satisfied. Others look happy but they have an emptiness that

they can barely describe. And some around us are flat-out desperate—dry, parched, nearly out of hope. THOSE are the people Jesus especially seeks, because they are the ones who know their need. They will leap to take the life that he offers--and then with joy, spread it around to all the people they touch.

There's your ministry, too.

But you can't give away what you don't have, yourself, can you?

Can you remember a time you were desperate? A time when you knew you needed something more in life? Have you seen how Jesus changes people? Have you tasted that Living Water that comes from Jesus' well, and nowhere else?

Come to the well! Come to get Living Water from Jesus!

Come to the well! Come wash away the dust of the old life, lived on your own.

Come to the well! Come drink deep, and slake that dull or driving thirst.

Come and ask Jesus for the living water he gives, that will become a spring rising up in you and overflowing to touch people you know.

O Master Jesus, give out what only you can give—eternal life, life that makes a difference, abundant life, grateful living. [If this is your prayer, then silently to God, say, "That's my prayer, Lord. Please, for me!"] . . .

And God's people said, *Amen*.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 29, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]