

Living Water

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Scripture: John 4:5-14

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. ⁷A 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."

In these uncertain times as we continue to get more news about the coronavirus and the ways people have responded, including taking more than is needed, there are some who are in need of what we used to take for granted.

Last week I heard of someone who was low on toilet paper and quickly grabbed as many as I could and stuffed them in a bag, as many as would fit. I handed the supply to him and as he walked away, he looked as if I had just handed him rolls of gold.

I wish I could have said to him, if you take toilet paper rolls from me, you'll never have empty cardboard rolls every again in your house.

Well, I'd surely not only have a power that toilet paper companies would want to eliminate, but I'd also be so terribly popular that I wouldn't have much of a life since everyone would be asking me for these magical rolls of toilet paper that never ran out.

Okay, this is absolutely ridiculous, but it came to my mind as I was revisiting the time Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well.

There's more to what happened than what I just read, and I'll get to that in a moment.

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman who met him at the well that he had special water that he called living water, which would become a spring of water flowing in them, overflowing to eternal life.

No doubt the Samaritan woman did not understand since she was so excited at the thought of having this ever-flowing water that would save her the arduous trips back and forth to the well, rain or shine, to get water.

In fact, if you read the rest of what happens between the Samaritan woman and Jesus you'll find some very interesting things that reveal so much about Jesus, the woman, and the power of this living water that was gushing from within her as soon as she believed in who Jesus was. Jesus confirmed that he was the one she was speaking of when she said that the Messiah was coming, who was called Christ.

Let me stop here and say at that time, the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus was not supposed to happen. At that time in history, Samaritans and Jews were not supposed to associate. According to the Jews, there was only one place to worship, and that was in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans worshipped outside of Jerusalem. In fact, the Samaritan women knew from Jesus' attire that Jesus was in fact Jewish. And she was not shy about pointing that out, having been judged her entire life by Jews, which she included and assumed Jesus looked and judged her in the same way.

If you read further what is recorded in the Gospel of John, you'll find that the disciples were astonished, almost dumbfounded, that Jesus was talking with a woman like that, and on top of that a Samaritan.

Growing up, I saw how women were treated differently from men. And sadly, that continues to happen today. Sure, there are some favorable ways that women are treated, and those ways should be upheld and celebrated. However, history has recorded, and we have witnessed in our lifetime, continued discrepancies between how men and women, and women of color, are treated differently. Sometimes it is shocking, almost unbelievable, and most of us are left dumbfounded or perhaps not even believing.

And I will not lie and say that I was not affected by being brought up in this country to be corrected more times than I would have liked about my biases, my ignorance, and my pride. So many of these misguided thoughts seem to be ingrained in me through so many sources, not only the media, but by others also.

Now, do not think I am bashing myself or all males, just saying there were key points in my life where women, who were thankfully bold, were not only upset with me for saying or acting a certain way, but were passionate about teaching and correcting me. And I truly thank God for each of them, including my mother.

I want to share one time when I was a new youth pastor, and I played basketball, and had since I was in elementary school. Well, there was a new volunteer who played basketball with amazing skill. Sometimes we engaged in what you might call "trash talking." Even though this wasn't acceptable in my favorite sport, tennis, which I had played since I was a child, I knew

that it was part of the game of basketball. Well, I said something that angered her. And she challenged me to a game of horse, which I have to say I'm thankful that we didn't play one-on-one. She not only beat me, but crushed me in 5 consecutive games and left me eating my own trash words, including the ones that had pushed it too far when I said she wasn't as good because she was a female. It was definitely not my proudest moment, to say the least. It was trash talk, but there are lines, even when trash talking.

I'm not going to paint a false picture and say that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. But it was definitely a lesson for me, not only a newfound respect on the court, but a shift in my mind, for sure.

I share this because in those times, Samaritans, and particularly women, were not seen in the highest light.

And when this Samaritan woman was asked for water by a Jewish man, she put it back on Jesus, that he wasn't supposed to talk with her according to their views of Samaritans and women. This was confirmed by the dumbfounded disciples who were so astonished they didn't say anything, even "Jesus, what are you doing talking to a woman, and a Samaritan woman at that?"

We learn a lot from Jesus in how he did not follow these ingrained systems of judging others, including ways of thinking and acting towards those who have been labeled as "less than" or "not as good as". He did not judge others on where they lived, where they came from, and of course, because the person was not male.

This is important because on top of that there were reasons the Samaritan woman was not so bold or confident in life, which some say is the reason she went to the well at the hottest time of the day where she would most likely not run into anyone. Getting water would be one of the first things you'd do, or depending on your needs and timing the last thing in the day before the sun went down. This way it would be ready for work and use at sunup, rather than trying to get water in the dark of morning.

There were things she was not proud of, but Jesus revealed he already knew about those things through a series of questions and answers, answers he eventually revealed of knowing when there was no way he could have known unless he was a prophet or more.

When she realized Jesus was most likely the promised Messiah, the Savior, and the one called Christ, she left her jug and ran to tell everyone who would listen that she met the Messiah. She said that he must be the Messiah because he told her everything she had ever done.

And more powerful is in the way in which she shared her new faith. It was just as Jesus said it would be if she drank of the living water he was offering. It gushed out of her to eternal life, not only for her, but those who heard and believed though they had not seen or met or heard Jesus for themselves.

There were no doubt people who wouldn't have given the Samaritan the time of day, even in her own town, or believe her.

And I have to pause and say here, and I am continually learning, how we speak about and treat people who we may judge for one reason or another, and none of us are perfect I must add, that I have grown to the point of being bothered, in a good way, about what I see and hear. Along those lines, I am bothered that we do know the Samaritan woman's name. I say this because I've had to say "the Samaritan woman." And, I refuse to call her simply "woman" or "the woman."

For she was as important as any one of the disciples, for she placed her faith in Jesus and shared that eternal life that was gushing out of her to so many. It was that living water that she received from Christ that could not help but be felt, shared, received, and believed by those who heard it.

In fact, when they went to Jesus, who thankfully was still at the well and waiting for them, they insisted that Jesus stay with them. The Samaritans were shocked that a Jew would associate with them when they were treated like lesser humans by Jews at that time in history. Many more believed because Jesus spent time and spoke to them the words of life, giving them the living water that would gush up to eternal life in them too.

And they told the Samaritan woman, who was most likely to herself most of the time, as we guess from her going to the well at the least busiest time of the day, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

She was so excited and wanting to share, and the living water, the faith Christ had given to her, was gushing so much and convincingly, that they believed in what she said before meeting Jesus. And of course, even more faith after Jesus met with them..

Sometimes it's hard to see the amazing power of truly encountering Jesus. Back then at the well, and even today.

Jesus knows us today, as he knew the Samaritan, more anyone else and surprisingly more than she knew or was aware about herself. She was told by others that they were better than her because of where they were born or what group of people they came from or associated with. She was told by some others, even within her own town and people, that because of her lifestyle she was less than or not as good as others. Jesus knew the worth of the Samaritan woman, just as he sees the worth of every single person regardless of gender, race, age, or any other factor with which we unfortunately at times tend use to devalue and even mistreat others. He showed her how he valued her I how he spoke with her, treated her, and without her realizing, sent her, even when she may have not realized her worth, with such fire and passion and faith that she couldn't contain it. She left Jesus instead of staying with him to talk more so that to tell

everyone she could; those she loved, those she knew, and those she hardly knew or avoided that lived in her town of Sychar, gushing out the gift of Jesus of eternal life.

Well, in my life, I admit that there are times I'm excited to tell people, even total strangers, of some awesome and helpful news that would really benefit them, especially if they are convinced that I am really telling them the truth, not trying to trick or scam them. If they believed in what I was telling them, they could really benefit. They may even tell me, if I see them later, that they passed on my helpful advice to others, who also benefited. I have to say, it's a great feeling to know that I helped one person, and possibly more, with my tip or advice.

There were times I had been in line buying something and would tell others in line to use a free code to get 20%, 30% or even more off their purchase. They at first might be skeptical, but when I see them go ahead of me, use the code and then look back at me with pleasant surprise and then thank me for telling them about the discount, I have to say that I feel really good about what I was able to share. I even want to tell others about how it felt to help others.

More significant to me is when you know of an expert who you can refer someone to, an expert who can help those with issues that are hard to diagnose unless they see such a specialist. Just one example was having poison ivy for the first time in my life. When I went to urgent care they misdiagnosed it 3 times, so I was on all sorts of medications, ointments, and sleeping in another room to protect my family. Finally, I went to see a specialist. And before I could say anything, she gave me the correct diagnosis. I was shocked. Three other doctors were not only confused, but asked me to let them know if I ever found out what it was since I said I'd go and see a specialist. It cleared up in one week after having suffered for almost 3 weeks!

And low and behold, a good friend of mine had a similar thing going on, and he was getting no relief after several weeks. I told him if he gets sick of it, go and see my specialist. And he called me as if I had given him a health lottery ticket and he won the healing and relief he needed.

For me, knowing what helps others is something that drives me. And I know that is true of us all. I know we all have stories of sharing an amazing deal, meal, recipes, new quilting technique or tip that saves time or improves quality as well as design and artistic flare, as well as hundreds of other things, including health tips.

If we know it truly helps, we're usually gushing out to others with things we want to tell others that will help them. And, oh how it hurts when instead of others thanking you, they may even react with annoyance or to me, worse, they laugh at you, question you, and don't even try to consider what you know could or in fact would help them.

And so we may over time get discourage, embarrassed, and even as if it was almost wrong to share what good news we have to share with those who need it.

However, God shows us through the Samaritan woman that though we may not feel at times that we're good enough, because of what others, some groups, institutions or even our own selves tell us what we are worth or not worth. Jesus tells us that he not only wants to give us this living water, but he wants it to gush in and out of us so that it flows into the lives of others. When we share it in whatever ways we can, and in every manner possible, those who see the living water of Christ in us will at least listen, watch, see, and possibly come to a place where they encounter Jesus for themselves, like the Samaritan woman at the well, to make their own decision to drink of the same living water as you once did.

Looking back at my life, I'm so glad my parents gushed and continue gushing Christ's living water in and through their lives to this day; through the ways in which they raised me, loved me, corrected me, guided me, supported me, prayed for me, and did everything they did for me, including being continually proud of me so that I would not feel less than what I should as their son. They showed me the same kind of love they received from Christ, and that same love they want me to share with my wife, children, friends, church, community, and all, including those who may see themselves as my enemies at one point or another.

Looking back, I'm also so glad for:

- All my Sunday School teachers who were gushing and overflowing with Christ's living water
- My friends I grew up with in church who were gushing with Christ's living water
- The older members of the church who showed me through their love of serving, giving, praying, singing, volunteering, leading, and doing all sorts of things around the church, community, and world, showing that we can all make a difference
- The pastors that led our church, the youth pastors, the music ministers, and all the other leaders
- And I never forget those who thought they weren't doing much in the background or were shy and didn't like to be up front or recognized. I see now, more than ever, how important their service was and is, even if they feel like they aren't looked upon as important, or even as equals at times.

We must remember we are all among those who God uses most powerfully, like the Samaritan woman.

If you feel like you're not gushing with the living water of Christ, it's okay. It never runs out, and the Source, and that's with a capital S, is always there to renew and reignite your faith, and help you overcome what others may say or think of you, what the world says or thinks of you, or even what you may have come to believe about yourself that limits what God can do in and through you.

Go back to the well with all your worries, hurts, shame, and guilt, whether they're placed on you by others, by yourself, or even a combination of both. It matters not. Take them all to Christ and drink deeply from the living water that truly satisfies and never ends.

I end with saying, during these uncertain and turbulent times, take time to draw nearer to the One who can draw from the well that flows true and living water. Jesus can help you, help those you love, and help those you are able to reach and touch so they can for themselves find God's strength, peace, hope, perseverance, and love so that whether we go another few week or another few months or even more, that we can journey through these time better because we know the source of our life and faith. Amen.