

John 4:5-42

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?' ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' ³²But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' ³³So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' ³⁴Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, '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.'¹

¹ Bible Passage from oremus Bible Browser <https://bible.oremus.org/>.

Living Waters
Sermon by Makayla Dahleen
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Grace Lutheran Church, River Forrest, IL

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

We have heard this saying many times but it feels especially true this Sunday as we worship with each other through technology.

As we gather together virtually from our various places, I imagine we carry many emotions.

Some people may be anxious and worried that the situation around Covid-19 is serious enough for this response. Others may be relieved with the permission to stay at home and protect their loved ones who are most vulnerable. And still others may be annoyed and wondering if this is all necessary. No matter what you are feeling this morning, God can hold all of our emotions, and worries, and annoyances. God can carry it all.

We see evidence of this in our reading from Exodus. The Israelites, who have just crossed the Red Sea as they run from Pharaoh's army and flee their bondage in slavery now find themselves wandering and wondering how they will survive in this wild and unknown wilderness. The Israelites are quarreling among each other, dissatisfied with their leadership, and even put God to the test as they ask "is the Lord among us or not?"

You may also be asking this question. And even if you cannot feel that you can answer it right now, you have a community and people praying with and for you trusting that God with us. God did not let the Israelites go thirsty. When Moses struck the rock with his staff, water rushed out of it. God walks with us as we wonder through this wilderness of uncertainty.

When I was in college and my own uncertainty about the future or my anxiety would become too much, I would often go for a run. Now I realize this coping mechanism cannot work for everyone but at the time it did help me. My favorite trail was along the Upper Iowa River. I think it is interesting that many running and walking trails are along rivers. As humans something calls us to water. To be close to our earth's living waters. The river had so much life. I would match my footsteps and my breath to the rhythm of the bubbles and the softly rolling rapids. The river and I breathed together and with each footstep I was more connected to the earth. It grounded me and gave me moments of peace. I was able to feel God's grace. I wasn't sure how, but I knew everything would be alright. The living water of the river was a symbol for me of God's grace.

In our Gospel text Jesus provides God's grace as living water. It is curious that in this text Jesus is also in need of a little grace himself. He is tired and thirsty after a long journey and in desperate need of a drink of water. After all, he was truly human, which we will profess later today in the Nicene Creed.

Jesus is traveling from Judea through the neighboring territory to the north, Samaria on his way to Galilee. However, the people in these territories are not good neighbors and consider each other foreigners. The Jews and the Samaritans have a complicated history as the Samaritans are an offshoot of ancient Israel. They are both descendants of Jacob, but practice their religion differently and overall do not often associate with each other. But this does not prevent Jesus, the savior to the whole world from traveling through.

In the heat of the midday sun, Jesus meets a Samaritan Woman. This woman also finds herself in a desperate and potentially vulnerable situation because men and women wouldn't normally be having a conversation alone together, especially a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. Jesus is an outsider to her. Could he be trusted?

This woman, who is not even considered worthy enough to have a name, is an outsider in her own community. We know this because she is at the well in the middle of the day when the sun is the hottest. The normal practice would have been for all the women in the village to take their buckets or water jars to the well together in the early morning before it was too hot, but she is here alone exposing her desperate situation.

Jesus is also there alone and in his desperate need for water, he asks her for a drink. In this simple question Jesus breaks many barriers. He talks to a woman alone, and is willing to drink from the same dishes as her. "Jews did not share things in common with Samaritans."²

This is not a matter of sanitation or hygiene, but exclusion and prejudice. The separation of these two people groups is similar to the segregation of drinking fountain and swimming pool between white and black people in the United States during the 1950s and 60s. This is not just ancient Israelite history, but part of our own ongoing story of relating to people who we consider the "other." Jesus breaks down barriers and reaches out for her assistance.

We cannot forget that Jesus is the foreigner here. He is the outsider in a city not in his own territory. The Samaritan woman first seems to challenge him but through their conversation it becomes apparent that they both have something to offer each other. She can provide Jesus a drink of water from the well, and Jesus encourages her that he can provide living water.

In their mutual quest for water Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah. He does this through their exchange about her lack of a husband. She admits that she does not have a husband and then Jesus reveals that he already knows that. He even knows she has had 5 husbands.

Now, NO where in this text does Jesus call her a "sinner" nor does he forgive her from any "sin." This woman is an outsider and considered of ill repute, but this is not her fault or lack of morality. In those days, women were not allowed to get a divorce. She may very well be in a system of Levirate marriage where her husbands have died so she has been forced to be passed along to marry her husband's brother. We do not know exactly what is going on in her situation

² John 4:9

but we know that she has been rejected by her community, but she is not rejected by Jesus. Instead he respects her and shows her the grace that her community never could. In their conversation he reveals he is the Messiah by his ability to name her deepest truths without ever having met her before.

Have you ever had someone take you seriously in a way that no one else would? It's like at a party or maybe a career networking event where you are just standing on the edge of the room too shy, or too different, or too unfamiliar with the language to be regarded by anyone else. But then another person who is on fringes of this room starts a conversation and within 10 minutes you have talked about your own stories and vulnerabilities. It's like that. Sometimes we have conversations with strangers that go deeper than we could ever anticipate. Perhaps it has happened on an Airplane.

I remember being on a plane home from a conference. I was perfectly happy to sit and read my book but the woman next to me asked me what I was reading. We talked about the book a little but then the conversation moved on. She told me that she was flying back from a dance audition as she hoped to be a professional dancer. We ended up talking for 3 hours about our hopes and dreams for the future.

When the flight attendant came around and asked if we wanted something to drink, all of a sudden I got all insecure. I really wanted a coke, because the day was exhausting but I was sitting next to an extremely fit and beautiful athlete, and I wanted to seem like I cared about health and fitness too.

This might sound ridiculous or silly, but I have struggled with my own body image, weight, and restricted eating, and have had to work through remembering that thinness is not the same as fitness. To be perfectly honest I still struggle with this today. I have believed the lie that society tells women and men alike that they must be a certain size to be beautiful.

So on that airplane, I ordered a Coke and then turned to my companion and said something like, "I know soda is not good for me but I'm tired." The woman next to me said, "Girl, please. I'm tired too." And she ordered a Coke. I went ahead and told her that especially in my youth I struggled with my body image and asked what that is like for dancers.

She told me that, "It can be a struggle to be judged on your appearance all the time," but she said, "I try to remember that I am beautiful and my worth is not my looks but my strength. Strength to move my muscles to music and strength to move beyond what society says about me."

I walked off that plane feeling stronger than ever before thanks to the grace that the woman showed me. I felt like I could try to leave behind my own insecurities and lean into my strengths.

The woman who met Jesus at the well was also changed by a conversation filled with grace.

Jesus listened to her and treated her with dignity. He trusts her enough to reveal himself to her through their conversation about her own vulnerabilities and how society has treated her like an outcast.

She then returns to her village. But in this moment, she does something curious. **She leaves her water jar.** On a practical level I believe that she leaves her bucket for Jesus so that he can finally get a drink. And, when she leaves her water jar behind, she is also leaving behind all of her rejection and shame. She leaves behind not her own sin, but the sins committed against her in an unfair system and society. She takes with her the grace of Jesus' living water.

I imagine her head is held a little higher. And she is ready to let the living water wash away her past. She is ready to start a new life as a follower of Christ. She goes into the city and gathers all the people together to tell them about the Messiah. These are the very same people who have rejected her and made her an outcast. But today they are listening to her and even follow her as their leader as they go out and meet Jesus at the well. The entire city believes in Jesus because of the women's testimony. She has been restored to her community,

The grace of living water leads to living a new life. We also have access to this grace in living water. In the waters of baptism all of our sin, rejection, and shame are washed away so that we can live a new life in Christ. We may not remember our baptism. It may have been when we were just a baby, so we remember the promise of God's grace whenever we witness a baptism or encounter water!

Martin Luther said "When you wash your face, Remember your Baptism." Today we say "When you wash your hands, remember your baptism." As we scrub and maybe play with the soap bubbles, for 20 seconds, we can remember that we are loved children of God. We can remember that we walk in God's grace through this uncertain time.

Right now, is a time when we need God's grace. We need to call upon the Lord's grace and we need to be gracious with ourselves when we are tired or anxious. Give yourself a moment to become centered or grounded before having to make big decisions.

I imagine if you are a parent you will call upon the Lord's grace when you need to be patient with your kids. They might miss their friends and ask a million questions you can't answer. It's ok not to have the answers.

And kiddos, our youth group, we can ask for God's grace to help us be patient with our parents. They are just trying to keep us healthy.

We ask for God's grace to be with our leaders as they make difficult decisions. We seek God's grace for those who find themselves in foreign lands. We seek God's grace for our planet that rushes with living waters. We are like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness crying out as we thirst for God's presence. But like the women at the well, we have been made anew in

Christ's living water. In our baptism all of our rejection, and fear and anxiety is washed away. In our baptisms we are promised God's grace as we are called to live as children of God.

Living as God's children might look different for us, just for now. For now, we will have to reach out our hearts and not our hands.³ And yet, nothing can separate us from the love and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We walk with uncertainty. We try not to fear. We trust in God's love and grace. Now and forever. Amen.

³ Language inspired by the poem "Pandemic" by Lynn <http://www.lynnungar.com/poems/pandemic/>