

Living Water

John 4:5-26

Next to the air we breathe, water is the primary element in God's creation. Water comes in all shapes and sizes, depending on its use and temperature, as we've seen in the precipitation over the last few days. When water is frozen, it is solid. We put ice in many beverages, and snow falls on the mountains and on our driveways and sidewalks. When water is above freezing, it is a liquid. We drink it, shower with it, bathe with it, and wash our clothes and dishes with it. Finally, when water is heated, it becomes a gas. It forms clouds and fog and steam. Water is everywhere in our lives.

Or at least it should be, and needs to be. Without fresh water, your body cannot be sustained. Without water, nothing can live. Human beings—like all living things—need water not only to survive but to thrive. Our bodies are mostly made of water, and without it, quite simply, we die. Water is life.

Water is especially important in the desert. When water is rare, it becomes more valuable. One UN study claims that 2/3 of the global population will soon live in water scare areas, and that over 700 million people will be displaced because of drought. Others claim that wars will not be fought over oil, but over water. Here in Iowa, farmers carefully watch the drought maps, hoping they'll get enough rain and snow at the right times for crops to grow.

We all thirst. Even if it's not literal water, we still thirst. And we try to quench our thirst by all kinds of people and things that we think we will satisfy us: money, sex, power, popularity, fame, recognition, entertainment. But they don't satisfy. Even after we obtain them, we are still thirsty. We're left high and dry, empty, disappointed, and dissatisfied.

But there is a "thirst" in each of us that is even deeper than our need for physical water. And that is our thirst for wholeness and connection with God and other people. We are created for communion with God and community with each other. The Bible says that God has placed eternity in our hearts, a deep spiritual thirst. And that thirst can only be satisfied by God. But our sin gets in the way of our need, separating us from God and isolating us from each other. Sin wants us to be empty and alone, with a thirst that can never be satisfied.

It's in that context that we see this Samaritan woman who Jesus meets at the well. She comes in the middle of the day, approaching the well, alone, hot and thirsty. This woman is everything that a good Jew thought was bad about Samaritans. She was an outcast among outcasts.

More than that, this woman's life had dried up. She was rejected by her fellow villagers, and came to the well alone. While all of the other villagers came to get their water when it was cooler, in the morning, she comes in the heat of the day. In the course of the conversation with Jesus, the reason is revealed. This woman had had five husbands, and was now living with a sixth man. A string of broken relationships that even if she was repeatedly widowed would have made her an outcast. Her life has isolated her from everyone around her, as she attempted to hide from the public shame and scorn. Friendships had dried up, leaving her alone and isolated. She thirsts for something more.

After revealing her sordid past, after revealing everything that he knows about this woman, Jesus reveals himself to her. "I who speak to you am he." He reveals himself as the Messiah, as the Christ. He reveals himself as God, who

knows everything. Jesus reveals Himself as the one who knows everything about the woman, but talks with her and loves her anyway. And at this point, at the end of the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone, Jesus has shown the woman who she is, and who he is. From that beginning, from Jesus revealing her sinfulness, Jesus shows who he is, and what he does. Contrary to the woman's previous experience with Jews who had been made unclean by her presence, Jesus instead sanctifies, cleans, all that he sees.

How has your life dried up? Maybe, like the woman at the well, it's a string of broken relationships, a string of bad decisions. Maybe, instead, all of your job prospects have dried up. Or maybe your mouth is dry because of a disease, or the side effects of medication or radiation therapy, or the grief and nervousness that come with watching a loved one suffer from those symptoms. There's a lot in life that can dry us up.

Even if we recognize our need for water, we can try to quench our thirst with things that do not satisfy. Instead of being filled with the living water from Jesus, we fill ourselves with food and drink, with a thirst for ambition or power or peer recognition, or a deep desire for any number of things that keep us from God. We are like sailors adrift on the ocean, surrounded by water that will only make them thirst more. What can possibly quench our thirst?

Like the woman by the well, we also thirst for wholeness, healing, forgiveness, hope, and grace. And Jesus freely offers living water to everyone who thirsts.

But on the cross, Jesus said, "I thirst," one of the last words from the cross, and one of the phrases that shows us the agony he was in. On the cross, water and blood pour forth to show

he was truly dead, and to give us life. On the cross, Jesus Christ died for our sins. On the cross, he was glorified because the sinless Son of God died for unholy, empty, thirsty sinners like you and me.

In Israel, there are two bodies of water along the Jordan River. The Sea of Galilee is where the disciples fished, and where people still fish. It's full of life and gives life to those around it. The other body of water is the Dead Sea. The area around the Dead Sea is just as you'd expect from the name; dead. The water there isn't living water. It doesn't flow. It doesn't give life. The difference between these two bodies of water? Water flows out of the Sea of Galilee. Water doesn't flow out of the Dead Sea. As the water evaporates, the salt remains behind, making the Dead Sea the saltiest body of water on Earth. Everything keeps flowing through the Sea of Galilee. It has living water, flowing water, water that isn't just trapped. It flows outward and onward.

Even though we live in a time where water flows out of faucets and drinking fountains without much thought or effort on our part, we will still get thirsty. We still wait until we will thirst no more. We wait until the promise comes true, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Until then, we see how the water around us gives us life, and points us to Jesus who gives us living water that fills us to overflowing.

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