**John 4:5-42**

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) 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.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.’ The 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.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

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?’ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’ They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.” I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’

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

Sermon -

How are you feeling about these unusual times? During my 13 years at Ascension we have been closed for worship just 2 Sundays, both connected to heavy snow. And now with the corona virus pandemic, we are closed 3 Sundays in a row, to the end of March. And all church activities cancelled. And all other groups at the church cancelled. Wow. Just a reminder that we will be keeping office hours. And I will be available by phone and text and email and Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. All our communication tools will be very helpful in this time.

Did you get to go to the store recently? I did try to do some shopping on Thursday, and I have never seen the Aldi parking lot totally filled. Bottled water was in big demand, and almost gone. There was no sanitizer left, no Lysol wipes, no toilet paper. But I did find fruit and vegetables and other food staples. I hope you all have sufficient for the days ahead. Actually, I’m not sure about why the stocking up on water. We have pretty good city water in Columbus. Are people afraid that something will happen to the city water, that it could get cut off or be contaminated? I’m not sure.

We have a wonderful scripture today that is focused on water. Jesus is thirsty from a long dusty walk, and is sitting right by a well in Samaritan territory at noon. The well has water, but it is deep down, and he doesn’t have a bucket. In the early morning and the evening there would be people lining up for water there, with their buckets, but not in the middle of the day. Thankfully a local woman comes to draw water, and Jesus asks her to give him a drink. She is very surprised as she can see that he is a Jewish man; and she is a Samaritan woman. It’s a long story as to why many Jews regarded Samaritans with contempt. They would never have wanted to share a drink with a Samaritan. They social-distanced themselves so they didn’t get contaminated in any way, including religiously. But Jesus in his typical way is not afraid. Remember Jesus saying; “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.” Hold those words – living water. The woman – I wish we knew her name – could only think of the water in the well; actually a famous well of Jacob and Leah and Rachel. The Samaritan woman says to Jesus; “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep; Where do you get that living water? Surely you are not greater than Jacob, who gave us this well, he and his family and flocks drank from it.” Hear Jesus’ words in response; “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.” I must say that last line again. “The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” What a wonderful image of living water. Can you visualize it? The woman said – Sir – please give me that water. In her mind she thinks that she mightn’t have to keep coming to the well. And Jesus is thinking of something even deeper, of the abundant life that he wants her to have. And through the continuing conversation at the well, she comes to clearly see that Jesus is the source of that deeper life in God. There is the famous part when Jesus says to call her husband, and she says she doesn’t have one, and he says that he knows that she has had 5 husbands, and is now with another man. Traditional bible interpretation has made her out to be a loose woman, and that this is why she is at the well in the middle of the day. But maybe each of her husbands had died, and the current man wasn’t willing to risk getting married to her in case he was number six and soon to die. It’s interesting how easily bible interpretation can easily enough look for sexual scandal by women. She is amazed that Jesus knows her, knows all about her, knows what she most is thirsting for. Jesus, the Christ, talks with her one to one, heart to heart. And she goes back into the town and tells many people about Jesus, and they also come to believe that he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And many gather around him. They were so thirsty to know the Christ personally. The Samaritans were not left out, not shunned by Jesus. He very much includes them as his disciples. That’s the way he does it. What a witness this woman gives to Jesus? She tells her fellow townspeople where to find living water, and they lap it up. I love this image of water, living water that fills this reading. What comes to mind for me is a video on Facebook of an Australian boy, maybe 3 years old, who has grown up in a rural area where there has been constant drought for years, and just a month ago, his experiencing rain for the first time in his life. Such joy. He does a merry dance holding up his hands. Is your life dry in some ways? Are you in some kind of wilderness? How is Lent going for you? This scripture is helpful on our Lenten journey. Just like with the Samaritan woman, Jesus meets you where you are, with your own history, your challenges, your vulnerabilities; He knows where you have been marginalized, shamed. Jesus knows your feelings about this present time; your fears, your anxieties, your uncertainties. And he sits with you and he hears your questions, your prayers. And he offers to you just what he offers to the woman; the invitation to drink deeply of living water; the water that will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. Remember your baptism; how you were brought into Jesus’ life and story with water. Baptism calls you to repentance; to let Jesus continue to drown what is old and dead in you, what gets in the way of a deeper life with him, and to pray for Jesus new life to surge, to lift you up, to give you courage for living in these days, to help you see where you can lift others up in this time of fear and uncertainty, to help you see where you can witness to Jesus bringing life, salvation to a world so much in need of it, bringing that spring of living water. Keep imagining in prayer that fountain of living water welling up in you, and flowing out to others. Jesus bless you and keep you. Amen.

P.S. It is a different kind of Lent. We go from having wonderful soup suppers to having to make soup at home. We go from having extra opportunities for worship, for holy communion, to not gathering together. If you feel a deep need for Holy Communion at this time, please make an appointment with me. I will make a Onecall message each day with a verse to reflect on and carry, and a prayer thought. Let us know any other ways that you think we could better remain connected at this time.

Let us pray - Lord God, we pray for all directly suffering from the corona virus in this time, in whatever part of the world. I pray that world leaders, health experts, will come to work more closely together for solutions. We pray that this time of isolating will help to reduce the number of people catching the virus, especially the most vulnerable. Bless and keep safe children who will be home from school these next 3 weeks. Bless their families. We pray that all will have enough food through the sharing of others. Move us where we can be helpful. Amen.