



WORSHIP RESOURCES

SERMON SUGGESTION

“...but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” — John 4:14a

Water is life. We know that, on average, a human can only survive without water for about three days. In the Lake Chad Basin, where communities rely on this precious resource for everything from drinking and cooking to farming and fishing, survival is precarious, as water in the region becomes more scarce and harder to access.

The Lake Chad area once supported millions of people with its rich water resources, but the lake has shrunk by 90% since the 1960s, primarily due to climate change, unsustainable water use, and deforestation.

As the lake recedes, many families struggle to find enough water for daily use—whether it’s for crops, livestock, or personal consumption. Women and girls, in particular, bear the brunt of this burden, as they are traditionally responsible for fetching water, often travelling long distances in dangerous conditions. This puts them at risk of gender-based violence. The lack of clean water means not only thirst, but also increased disease, as families are forced to drink from contaminated sources. Livelihoods connected to water, such as fishing and farming, are also directly impacted, making life increasingly precarious.

Water is life.

In a resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 28 July 2010, the United Nations declared that:

- *The right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights;*
- *That all States and international organizations need to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer, through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all;*
- *And the UN welcomes the decision by the Human Rights Council to request that the independent expert on human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation submit an annual report to the General Assembly, and encourages the continuation of work on all aspects of this mandate.*

In short: water is life, and everyone has the right to safe, clean drinking water. And we all have the duty to ensure that all our siblings have access to it.

As we dig into our gospel this morning, we encounter a Samaritan woman who comes to the well in the heat of the day and meets a stranger. Not only a stranger, but a Jew—someone with whom she had nothing in common. Someone with whom society said she was not to associate. Someone who had no reason to speak to her, and yet asks her for a drink. What business is it of hers that he is thirsty? What business is it of his to offer her life?

The woman comes to the well at midday to avoid the ridicule and judgement of her peers. She is seen as less than—unworthy, an outcast. To avoid those who would shame her, she waits until no one else is likely to be at the well, and makes that long, hot, burdensome walk then.

Her plan is somewhat foiled, in that she isn't alone—and finds herself in the company of a Jewish man.

Jesus comes to the well not biologically thirsty. He doesn't need the Samaritan woman to fetch him water. He uses this request to engage her in conversation. He speaks first, as would be custom, but that is where tradition ends. She is surprised by, and perhaps leery of, his question. After all, he is a man and a Jew—breaking all the social protocols and norms by simply speaking to her. But she can't resist entering into the conversation. Isn't that just like Jesus—opening the door and inviting us to enter, then waiting for us to engage?

Jesus has something to share with this woman. He isn't simply offering to fill her biological need for H₂O—he's offering her so much more. "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

We know this to be our truth as Christians. We have each been immersed in that water through our baptism. We have been given the gift of the living water Jesus speaks of in this passage. So what does it mean for us, that we have been blessed with "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life"?

First and foremost, we have been given the gift of grace. We don't have to keep returning to a source of water to do the work of hauling up a bucket. Rather, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit offers us that renewal, that refreshment, that nourishment—without strings, and without us having to earn it.

Secondly, when we think of water gushing up, we don't think of a tap that can be turned on and off at will. Rather, this source of water is unstoppable, abundant, and overflowing. The grace that has been poured into us is more than we need—more than we can contain. So, what do we do with it?

As Christ-bearers, all we are being asked to do is allow that water gushing up within us to overflow and fill others. We do this when we care for our family, our friends, and the people we encounter day by day.

We know how to care for our water ways. We engage in beach cleanups, we're mindful of microplastics, we conserve water at home by turning off taps and fixing leaks. These are the things we've been learning for years. But how can we affect water justice and climate care in places so far away? How can our overflow fill Lake Chad and the people of the area?

Working with the Friends of Creation project through CLWR offers us the opportunity to pour our overflow to those who need it by the restoration of access to water and reversing some of these climate change trends in a number of ways.

First, we can work with nature to be part of the solution. The project is using nature-based solutions—like planting native trees that help keep water in the soil and stop erosion. It also supports communities to use simple ways to save and protect water, like building small basins to hold rainwater and digging irrigation channels. These systems help farmers use water more wisely, grow more food, and rely less on unpredictable rain.

Second, the project is helping to fix local irrigation systems, repair small water structures, and build mini-dykes to stop flooding. These changes help make sure water is still available during the dry season and help communities prepare for a changing climate.

In addition to planting new trees, the project is also supporting assisted forest regeneration—helping native trees and shrubs grow back in places where the land is worn out. Their deep roots protect the soil from being washed away, slow down rainwater, and help the ground soak up and hold more water. Alongside this, native trees like Moringa, Acacia albida, neem, and shea are being planted. These trees give long-term benefits, like food, income, and better soil, to the people who live there.

By using the grace-filled gifts we have been given to help others, we continue to allow our cups to be filled to overflowing by God, and also fill others in

turn. The best part of all of this is the amazing abundance God continues to pour out on us.

This is what hope looks like. It looks like water returning to dry land. Like trees taking root along the banks of the Chari River. Like a Samaritan woman, told that she is worthy of life that overflows.

The living water Christ offers is for all people. When we respond to that gift by letting it overflow into acts of justice and love, we take part in God's vision for a world where no one thirsts.

Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Watch the video of Rev. Susan Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) offering reflections and prayer on what she witnessed during her visit to CLWR's project in Chad and Cameroon: [**clwr.org/foc-water-video1**](https://clwr.org/foc-water-video1)
- For stories from the field, along with videos and other resources on this theme, visit [**clwr.org/foc-resources**](https://clwr.org/foc-resources)