

Gospel lesson

We continue this week in the Gospel of John with an unlikely encounter in the Samaritan countryside.



picture from <http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-018-samaritan-woman/>;

credit: Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

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John 4:5-42

NRSV

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

⁶ Jacob'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.)

⁹ 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.)

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';

¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ 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."

²⁶ Jesus 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?"

²⁸ Then 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?"

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

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'

³⁸ I 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."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.

⁴² 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 Savior of the world."

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The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>



picture from MMMS collection

The glass on the left contains tapwater and the other contains muddy rainwater and snowmelt. Which glass of water would you rather have to drink if you were thirsty? Why? <Let them respond>

Do you think the one filled with muddy rainwater and snowmelt is safe to drink? <Let them respond>

Do you know how many people worldwide lack safe drinking water? <Let them respond>

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO), at least 1.3 billion people in 2022 (out of ~8 billion) used a drinking water source contaminated with faeces, and over a quarter of the world's population does not have safely managed drinking water services.¹

What effects do you think that has on their health?

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>

<Let them respond>

About a million people per year die from diarrhea due to unsafe drinking water, and another quarter million pick up parasitic worms from infested water.²

How can we help people to get clean water?

<Let them respond>

Multiple organizations work to help people have access to safe drinking water, such as UMCOR and Living Waters for the World.³ Through mission partnerships, they bring water purification systems and health education programs to transform lives and communities.

We drink in a lot of content from TV and the internet. What do you think is safe drinking water for our souls? <Let them respond>

Do you think everyone in the world has access to it, or uses it? <Let them respond>

How can we help more people to have the water of eternal life that Jesus offers? <Let them respond>

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May we all turn to the safe drinking water for our souls that the Lord offers, and celebrate abundantly in the eternal life God provides through the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

<Hymn "Once A Woman Seeking Water" tune UMH #581>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>

³ <https://www.livingwatersfortheworld.org/>

Message: Companion for the Journey



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/renewed-in-mercy/third-sunday-in-lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-in-lent-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Wondrous Provider of living water and

Companion for our journey through life,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may joyfully be overflowing with and sharing with others Your grace. Amen.

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We continue our Lenten series today with "Companion for the Journey":

"In a world where we struggle to acknowledge our emotions as individuals, much less as a community, the psalms are master classes in how to faithfully express our emotions and experiences to God as a gathered body."

At Massah and Meribah, the Israelites had recently:

- escaped from Egypt after the plagues,
- followed the Lord as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of flame by night,
- saw Pharaoh's army destroyed after they safely crossed the sea,

- had bitter water at a prior camping place made sweet, and
- began receiving manna from heaven to eat.

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At each step, when they called to Moses for the Lord's help, the Lord provided. Yet here at Rephidim, they started complaining against Moses about their needing water and asking if the Lord was among them or not.

“Complaint” here has a legal connotation, akin to a lawsuit. They were acting as though they were owed water as soon as they wanted it, instead of trusting in faith that God would provide for their needs.

The psalmist refers to it as hardening of their hearts. Because their requests had been answered promptly, they began to act like spoiled children; furthermore, since they did not interact directly with God, they started blaming Moses for their quandary rather than praising God for all that had been done.

I think we see a version of that today, in that the church has been telling people for centuries that their sins are forgiven and giving directions on how people should live, to the point that philosophers, historians, and much of common society attribute accomplishments to the clergy and question whether God is in the world with us (i.e., exists) or not.

Do not harden your hearts to deny God's love for us!

At Massah and Meribah, there God was, in front of the people without destroying them with divine presence, providing for them in all these miraculous ways, and

they had the nerve to doubt! Yet God understood their confusion and fear; God loved them and provided for their needs – and so the psalmist says to praise God.

In **our** confusion and fear, God loves **us** and provides for **us**, too. God has a history of doing that for the faithful – and not just for physical needs.

Consider the Samaritan woman. Subject to bigotry from the Jews, misogyny of the day, and apparent alienation from other women in her town (as she was getting water alone at midday), she was disliked simply for being herself and therefore was vulnerable to predators.

She comes to the well and sees a Jewish man watching her. Wary, but in need of water, she starts to pull water from the well – and the man asks her for water. Was this his move, before having his way with her?

But Jesus did not threaten her or force her to do anything; rather, He disarmed her wariness with conversation and invitation. Even knowing her for what she was and what she had done, He showed respect for her. This was astonishing for the culture of the day.

Where it was completely opposite what “should” happen, Jesus showed love and compassion that transformed her life and her community, healing a rift between them in the process – and changing the outlook of the community toward Jews as well as possibly the disciples’ outlook toward Samaritans.

Also, He made it clear that the gift of living water was for all who worship God in spirit and in truth – a

gift for those who trust completely in the Lord, for those who simply have faith. There was no “earning” to be done for this. Furthermore, it would become *in them* a spring – a source for others to receive God’s love as well. The woman herself was evidence of this, as she hurried back to town and spread the word of Jesus.

We can be evidence of this today too, for when we share God’s love and tell others about Jesus, they become curious about this wonderful thing in our lives that benefits them too. They seek out the love of the Lord from the best source they know for it. Sharing our faith in concrete ways provides a much healthier source for them than merely following internet memes!

Like the Samaritan woman, before we even know that God is before us, God knows us, understands us, and loves us for who we are. But, we cannot experience the fullness of that love in relationship with God unless we trust God enough to accept it and be transformed.

Paul wrote to the Romans about the amazing love of Jesus. We learned to trust and love God because of Jesus, who died on the cross for us and then came back to us, proving that **nothing** can come between us and God’s love. “Since we are justified by faith” – our sins are forgiven by God so that we can have a loving relationship with and be transformed by our Creator.

We gain new perspective, boasting about God even in the midst of suffering that comes from adhering to Jesus’s teaching, because we know that God is at work in us and in the world. We can let go of fear and stand up for what is right and good instead.

God's love and inclusion are infinite and available for all - we need to make that known. Do not fear as the media drums; show God's agape love that all may live more peacefully. Defuse the anger brought on by drinking in media hype with demonstrations of God's love and see the new life that grows out of that.

Inviting others to God's love involves more than helping them; let **them** help **you** - just like Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink before offering living water. Let others feel and know they have intrinsic value before you and before God, that they are worthy of love, and have the best Companion imaginable for the journey of life waiting for them.

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And never forget that God is with and loves you too.