

On the Path: Thirst Quenching Water©**John 4:1-42****January 25, 2018****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent. Last week we began the 40 day journey on the pathway to the cross, following behind Jesus in his footsteps. We decided that we didn't need to take a lot of stuff with us. That pathway is rough and steep sometimes with stones that can cause us to slip and slide back down a ways.

In our backpack that we envisioned taking with us, we packed a devotion book that has reflections from Jesus' words; a journal to write down our thoughts, prayers, lessons learned. We could take a Bible, which would make the backpack heavier but, we would only get stronger carrying around that book.

Someone said we forgot to pack water. But here we are, our first stop on this pathway to the cross is in Samaria in a little village called Sychar. And we are at a well with Jesus! Water at last. The problem is, Jesus doesn't have anything to draw the water up out of the well. And he – and we – are thirsty.

Now, we might think it is a coincidence that a woman soon comes along to draw water from the well. I can't help but think it might not really be such a coincidence. Maybe – just maybe – Jesus knew she was coming. He certainly knew everything about her.

Jesus sits down at the well, tired and hot and thirsty. The disciples go off somewhere to buy food, so Jesus is alone there. Well, we are there too, in this scenario, but no one can see us. We are there to observe; to listen; to learn our first lesson on the pathway to the cross.

And Jesus does something that is so Jesus-like. He speaks to her. He speaks to her!

“Give me a drink,” he says to the Samaritan woman.

And right there, in that little sentence, he crosses a boundary – a cultural line that no Jew would normally consider crossing.

She is a woman. He is a man. Men don't speak to women unless they are married or somehow related. Women are too low for a man to speak to. Women were second class citizens. Plus, she could be in big trouble for talking to a man – especially a stranger. Especially a Jew.

But that's the other thing. For Jesus – a Jew – to speak to a Samaritan was unheard of. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. They were enemies from way back – as far back as the Assyrian exile when the Israelites (who were Jews) were taken into captivity.

Eventually – after hundreds of years of being in exile – some of the Israelites married women who were Assyrians. They had families. They settled.

But those Jewish people who were very strict, never accepted that intermarriage. And they considered anyone who did, to be unclean. In fact, they were like garbage. *Goy*, is the Greek word.

And then there was the disagreement over where the real place of worship – the temple – was. The Samaritans believed it was right there at Mount Gerizim, and the Jews, of course, believed it was in Jerusalem.

There is definitely a sacredness to the land there in Samaria. It's history rich with stories of Jacob being there, with his descendants. His well was there in that sacred place.

There is so much history and so much animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews – even though they are so closely related. It would take a whole series of bible study to delve into all that was involved.

The point that is important here is that they really hated each other. So much so that Jews would go way out of their way to avoid going through Samaria. Partly because they did not want to be contaminated with impurity. But they also, probably, had some fear for their lives. The hatred went both ways.

But, of course, that's not the way of Jesus. Jesus faces enemies head on. Jesus considers those who are thought of as lowly, to be worthy of love and redemption.

And so he spends this time with this woman. She is a woman who has way more against her than just being a woman and a Samaritan. I don't know about you, but I never liked it very much when my mom would say things like: "I know you better than you know yourself."

Or "I can read you like book."

I loved my mother, but I didn't want anyone to think they knew me better than I knew myself. Like they knew something about me that I didn't know, or didn't want to face. Or, perhaps wanted to hide.

So when Jesus had this conversation with this woman – after a very intelligent, theological discussion about worship, and the Spirit, and the Messiah – Jesus then said go get your husband.

Of course, he already knew all about her. She said, "I don't have a husband."

And he said, "Right. You've had five husbands but you're living with a man who is not your husband now."

I don't know. I would not feel good about a man who could read me that closely and know all my flaws. And yet, there must have been something about the way Jesus looked at her and spoke to her that was not judgmental or condemning. It seemed to really change her.

She went into the village and was quite possibly the very first woman evangelist to tell the good news. “I met a man who knows everything about me. Do you think this could be the Messiah? Come and see!”

And many of them went to see Jesus, and were changed, and believed.

Well, okay. You might be wondering what all this has to do with the title of the sermon – Thirst Quenching Water.

Remember way back in the beginning of Jesus’ encounter with the woman? We see him sitting there, thirsty. We see her coming to the well. She looks tired and not very happy. Really? What in her life does she have to make her genuinely happy? We don’t know whether her five previous husbands died, or left her. Either way, it couldn’t have been easy for her. And if she is living with a man who would not marry her, it indicates she maybe didn’t have much respect from him, which could mean she didn’t have much respect from her neighbors. And even worse – she probably didn’t have a lot of respect left for herself.

We see this odd encounter. Jesus asks for water, but then tells her if she would ask him he would give her Living Water – water that would make her to not be thirsty anymore. Water that would well up from a never ending spring of thirst-quenching water.

I told you the last time I preached on this text that my Grandad used to take my brother, David, and me to get “spring water.” Granddaddy would say, “Who wants to go with me to get water?” And David and I always loved to go along with Grandad.

We sat in the back seat and pretended to be driving. We enjoyed the time together, and the time with our grandfather, and we always had this little excitement deep inside because on the days we went to the spring, we almost always went to the park and zoo in the nearby town.

Recently, my son, David, and his family found the spring I had told them about. It is still there, and people continue to get fresh, spring water from that pipe someone put in a long, long time ago.

Here is a picture of the spring they found. It isn’t gushing up like Jesus says the spring with the living water will do, but oh, this water is refreshing and pure and cold. It is good and I still, to this day, remember how much we loved to go there and taste it, and to fill those gallon jugs my grandad had brought along.

And of course, we would then be back in the car and Grandad would say, “You know, I think I might be lost. I don’t think this is the way back home.”

David and I would look at each other and grin, knowing Grandad was teasing us. And we always ended up at the park to ride the train and the merry-go-round and to see the monkeys and the swan and other animals.

Such great memories. Spring water equals a wonderful childhood memory with people I loved so very much. In fact, my grandfather represents so much good and love in my life. I haven't shared much of this, but I feel led to share a little today. As a child, I was told by my dad and then by my stepdad that I was not worthy of love; I was fat and ugly and that people were laughing at me. I grew up as a teenager – who was a very normal size for a girl that age – believing I was the fattest, ugliest girl in school and believing what my stepdad said – that everyone was laughing at me. That they all knew who I really was.

Before you get all angry at my dad's, just let me say they both asked my forgiveness after I was grown and I did forgive them. But it was a very, very difficult time for me, growing up. My self-esteem and my own body image was about as low as it could go.

Except for my grandad. The quote I love is that “everybody needs a face that lights up when you walk into a room.” My grandad was that face. He is the one whom I knew I could depend on; the one I could trust; the one who really helped me to feel okay. He thought I was beautiful and he told me that just by the way he looked at me and treated me as a very loved and special person.

And somehow, that spring water we would go to, and the memory of going on to have fun afterwards felt like this Living Water Jesus talks about.

Except *that* water, and those memories, don't even compare to the Living Water Jesus offered to the woman at the well, and offers to us still today.

Think about it – her life, her situation, her self-esteem, her hopelessness of anything really changing – just suddenly did change and was transformed.

Living Water for the thirsty spirit that is feeling dry and withered up.

Living Water for the one who feels like she might already be dead.

Living Water for those who think there is no drink that can quench this thirst – this spiritual, empty, dry thirst.

Jesus offers it. Only Jesus can give it. It is grace. It is love. It is renewal. It is non-judgmental. It is forgiving. It is all because we are a child of God and we are all worthy of his love because – simply because we are his sons and daughters. Thirsty as we might be.

Come. Come to the well and meet the one who knows all about you. And loves you still. And offers you Living Water so you will never, ever thirst again.

Come.