

Third Sunday in Lent

BOTTLED WATER ISN'T BETTER WATER

John 4:5-42

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Analysis by Mark Marius

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7A 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.) 9The 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.) 10Jesus 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." 11The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but 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." 15The 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."

16Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18for you

have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23But 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. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

27Just 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?" 28Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he? 30They left the city and were on their way to him.

31Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35Do 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. 36The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying

holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They 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."

DIAGNOSIS: We Thirst

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *We Need a Drink*

What is your church thirsting for? What does it need? Does your church need more members to fill the pews? Does it need more money in the offering plate? Does it need more volunteers and leadership to fulfill its mission? Does it need modernizing? A contemporary service? A traditional service? More Christian education? A dedicated youth program?

What are YOU thirsting for? Economic stability? A fulfilling relationship with-God? Spouse? Parent? Child? Coworker? Are you thirsting for medical care and healing? Renewal? Spiritual, physical, or emotional? Do you thirst for a new body image?

Maybe your thirst eludes you, but all humanity thirsts. Even Jesus was thirsting in this text, physically (v. 7) and spiritually (vv.32-34). But where do we go to quench our thirst?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We Drink Bottled Water*

Chances are, like the woman drawing water from the well, we have been drinking bottled water. Water conveniently packaged, emanating from a natural spring, and readily available on the shelves of your local store where you can keep on coming back for more. Bookstores, publishing companies, banks and investment firms, insurance companies, national church bodies like the ELCA, are all selling bottled water. Why? Because in order to live we need to drink.

We think this bottled water will keep us alive. Self-help books, church programs and Bible studies, investment vehicles, insurance policies, gym memberships, medications, help to keep us hydrated. And without doubt, many of these things are necessary for our lives BUT they can't replace what Jesus is offering to us, nor are they worthy of our complete trust. These bottled-water products help hide the truth about ourselves.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Drinking Ourselves to Death*

But often we find ourselves trusting bottled-water products more than what Jesus offers-living water. Why? We don't trust that the living water Jesus provides alone can sustain us. Even pastors (who believe) may feel compelled to add on a thing or two to what Jesus is offering-just in case that alone doesn't pay the rent. And we try to justify ourselves by these additives. This is Lutheran so it must be ordained by God. In fact I have a certificate of ordination so I therefore must be distributing living water. But Jesus warns us that our pieces of paper are no better than Jacob's well and holy mountains. That bottled water we have been drinking is not as pure as the packaging indicated. Water that is stagnant and bottled up will not lead to life. Just as words about God don't always add up to God's Word (truth). So truth be told, we will never completely satisfy our thirst with the water we drink, and if we become dependent on it alone, we end up dying to our thirst.

PROGNOSIS: The Real Thirst Quencher

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Drinking the Real Thing (Spirit and Truth)*

The good news is that we are spared of dying to our thirst when the real thirst quencher comes to us, offering his living water. Jesus shares his living water with us even when we are still hitting the bottle. He takes our thirst away by dying to his. His thirst was not “complete”-ly satisfied until he died on the cross, thereby completing his Father’s mission (v. 34; John 19:28-30a) The real quencher for Jesus (and now for us) is when he gave up his spirit (19:30b). And when God resurrected Jesus three days later, our thirst had met its match, to be eternally quenched. It is from this act that Jesus’ living water flows to give us new life. No bottled water can make that claim since it can only sustain our old life for a short time.

And it is Jesus’ living water (spirited water) that reveals to us the truth behind his words and signs and allows us to trust its source, just as he did. The source is God, the living water is the Holy Spirit, and it is poured out through Christ. Holy Trinity!

Receiving the Holy Spirit is what allows us to worship God in spirit and truth.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Flowing Water*

Living water is flowing water. Don’t try to bottle it. Don’t try to sell it. Drink it. Trust it. Believe it. It’s the real thing that freely flows to everyone. This living water comes flowing to you like a fountain through the truth of the Gospel. As our ears drink it in, the water leads us to its source. And as it eternally sustains us we believe the promises God offers through it. The living water washes us clean by daily remembering our baptism. As the water flowed over our heads we became children of God and heirs to the kingdom. The water reminds us that

having already died with Christ the only thing left to share is new life like him.

The living water is also contained in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. So take it in since it makes us whole! So, by God, this water does keep us alive. With this living water we no longer feel the dirt or see the ash that smudges our face and our foreheads. Instead we recognize the cross from where the water flows. This living water has made us clean because it hydrates us with truth.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Serving Drinks for Everyone*

And since we know the truth given to us through living water, we let that water take us wherever it will flow. Into towns, cities, villages. At wells, bars, stores, and churches. Wherever we encounter thirsty people, we go-just like Christ. And, recognizing our own need to drink, we listen to what others say they hope will quench their thirst, because it's an opportunity to share our living water with them. We ask others to come to church-not to fill our pews, but to share our cup. We pass the offering plate-not to fill it with money to pay our bills, but as a conduit to share our resources with others who thirst. We ask others to come to Christian education classes-not to drive home our point of view, but to unleash the living water from Christ's teaching. We ask others to share in relationship with us-not because we are perfect for each other, but because through living water we may find perfection. As people respond to our invitations, they hear the Word of God, drink living water from the source, and trust that it is all they need to drink.

Living water is a well that can't be tapped. It is water that can't be bottled. A source that never dries up. Share some today.