

## The Gift That Finds Us

There is a deep, ancient ache running through all our readings today—an ache as old as humanity itself. It is the ache of thirst.

Not just a physical thirst, but the longing for assurance, for belonging, for hope that will not run dry.

Our scriptures today name the thirst we carry. And into that ache, scripture pours a promise: There is living water, and it is for everyone.

Our gospel story begins with Jesus sitting beside Jacob's well at noon. It is the wrong time of day to draw water. The temperatures are rising, and the sun is unforgiving as you strain to draw water from the depth of the well, and then carry it in jars to your home.

It is strenuous physical work and usually performed in the early hours of the morning, when there is dew still on the ground and temperatures are so much cooler.

It's the wrong time to meet anyone, the heat drives people indoors, under the shelter of trees or tents. But that is exactly when she arrives, the Samaritan woman, carrying her jar, carrying her story, carrying whatever it is that has pushed her to the margins of her own community and brings her alone to draw water during the heat of day.

She arrives thirsty. But not only for water.

Her story echoes another moment of thirst, Israel in the wilderness in Exodus 17. The people cry out at Massah and

Meribah, “Is the Lord among us or not?” Fearing that they shall die in the wilderness without water.

Their mouths are dry, yes, but their deeper thirst is for reassurance. For presence. For proof that God has not abandoned them.

Psalm 95 remembers that moment as a warning: “Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah.” Do not let **fear** and **anxiety** turn into suspicion of God’s intention or lack of presence.

The woman at the well carries that same question in her bones. Is God among us or not? Is God with me or not? She is human, navigating a life experience that was not kind to her...perhaps wearied by the rules surrounding marriage, death, spousal support, tradition. Passed from husbands, each dying from illness, war, age, accidents until finally she could no longer bare such arrangements...enough.

So instead, perhaps she chooses a man, who is old and kind, her gives her shelter, feeds her children without a marriage contract...she is doing what she has to...to survive. For this, unfortunate set of circumstance she is shunned.

This is the Samaritan woman, an outcast to be avoided, unclean, as a gentile, unworthy through her past. This is who Jesus meets at the well.

Jesus begins the encounter with a simple request: “Give me a drink.” As if he has been waiting for her. He begins not with judgment, but with vulnerability. Not with accusation, but with relationship, personal, intimate.

She is startled. A Jewish man should not speak to a Samaritan woman. A rabbi should not speak to a woman alone. A holy man should not speak to someone with her past.

But Jesus is not bound by the lines we draw. He is the God who stood on the rock at Horeb and let water flow for a complaining people. He is the God who hears the cries of the thirsty before they know how to pray. He is the God who shows up at the wrong time of day to meet the person everyone else avoids.

But...there is a gift we cannot earn, and it's wrapped in the kindness, mercy and compassion of Christ.

“If you knew the gift of God,” Jesus says, “you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

Romans 5 says it plainly: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God.” That is the gift of God's grace.

Paul writes that hope does not disappoint us because God's love has already been poured into our hearts. The living water cannot be bought; it is not a transaction but freely given. It is for all the thirsty.

The Samaritan woman is being seen and not shamed.

Sure, Jesus names her truth, not to expose her, but to free her.

“You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.”

He does not turn away. He does not condemn. He simply sees her. And being seen, fully, honestly, tenderly, becomes the doorway to transformation.

She asks about worship, about mountains and temples, about where God can be found. Jesus answers with a promise: “The hour is coming when true worshipers will worship in the spirit and truth.”

No more boundaries. No more exclusions. No more “us” and “them.” All are welcome.

Then she says, “I know the Messiah is coming.” And Jesus replies, “I am he.” The first person to hear this revelation in John’s Gospel is not a disciple, not a priest, not a leader, but a Samaritan woman with a complicated past.

The living water has found her. She leaves her water jar, the very thing she came for, because she has found something better.

She runs back to the people who had pushed her out and becomes the first to proclaim Christ Jesus. A woman!

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” Not with fear, or shame, but with joy.

The people who once avoided her now follow her to Jesus. The outcast becomes the well from which her whole community drinks.

Friends, we know this woman. Sometimes we are this woman. We know what it is to thirst for belonging, for forgiveness, for purpose, for a love that does not evaporate in the heat of the day. We know what it is to wonder whether God is among us or not.

And into that thirst, Jesus still speaks: “If you knew the gift of God...” “If you knew how deeply you are loved...” “If you

knew that hope is not a fantasy but a promise..." The living water is still flowing. Still offered. Still free. Still for everyone.

Not because we have earned it, but because Christ has poured himself out for us; Jesus, the One who meets us at our wells, the One who knows our stories, the One who gives us hope that does not disappoint.

So, I ask you gently today: Where are the places in your life where Jesus might be sitting, waiting to meet you with living water?

Where is the well you keep returning to, and what jar might you be ready to leave behind?

May the God who poured water from the rock, the Christ who offered living water to the outcast, and the Spirit who pours love into our hearts meet you in your thirst and fill you with hope that never runs dry.

Amen.