

The God for Those Who Thirst

It occurs to me this morning that we are all looking for the same thing. We are looking for something that will make our lives worth living. If you have lived very long at all, you know that much of life is hard and painful with a huge dose of monotony thrown in. The daily grind of making a living can quickly grind you down and dehumanize you; you feel like a cog in some impersonal unfeeling machine. Raising children is rewarding but oh how exhausting. Relationships are tricky: Sometimes they are exasperating, maddening, and disappointing. Sometimes they tear your heart out. Yet without other people in our lives, life is so, so, lonely. And then there is the whole issue of aging and dying--for ourselves and those we love. The pain is both physical and emotional. We need something, something larger to be a part of that will make it all worthwhile. Or, in the language of today's Scripture, we need a long deep drink of "living water."

As I look at the Scripture from John 4 this morning, the first thing that catches my eye is verse 4: "Now he had to go through Samaria." My initial response to that verse is to say, "No, He didn't." In fact, Jews normally skirted around Samaria, did everything they could to avoid it as they made their pilgrimages between Galilee and Judea. We are told the reason for this at the end of verse 9, where it says in parentheses: "(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)" Normally, the Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee and vice versa, crossed the Jordan River and followed the path along the East bank, thus avoiding setting foot on Samaritan soil. Nor was it a matter of time, Jesus didn't have a hot date in Galilee that He needed to be back at a certain time. So when John tells us that Jesus "had" to go through Samaria he is talking of a spiritual necessity, not a physical one. Always doing what He saw His Heavenly Father doing, Jesus had to go through Samaria as a matter of divine appointment.

John 4:5-8 tell us the nature of that appointment: "So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)"

Most of us have heard about the woman at the well. We have heard that she came to the well alone because the other women

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of the village Sychar didn't want, or were forbidden by their husbands, to associate with her. All the Samaritans were outcasts as far as most Jews were concerned, but this woman was an outcast among outcasts. She was considered a loose woman, a potential threat to every marriage and a bad role model for every young girl in the village. But the main thing we need to know is that she was in desperate straits. We don't know how she ended up in that circumstance, but we know where she was. She was the loneliest, emptiest, person in Sychar. No one was more in need or thirstier for something that would make life worth living than she was. No one was more in need of living water.

Now the overarching question that I see being raised and answered in our Scripture lesson today is this, "Where and how are we to find that something that will make our lives worth the living? Where and how are we to find living water?" The first clue is found in verse 7: "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" At first this seems all backwards. She is the one who needs ministry and yet the first words out of Jesus' mouth are asking her to minister to Him. What's this about?

I faced a similar experience this past week. I met a man who had been at a funeral I preached two weeks ago. This man was shaken by the death of the man who had died and had been touched by something in the funeral message I gave. He told me this in a couple of minutes and then asked me if I could use some tomatoes. The truth was I could use some tomatoes, but I think even if I had tomatoes falling off my counter and out of my refrigerator, I would have said, "yes, I could use some tomatoes." Why? Because in allowing him to minister to me I was affirming him; I was saying that he had worth, that he had something of value to give me, which is the beginning of establishing trust and perhaps the beginning of a friendship.

Jesus engages the woman in conversation and suggests that she has worth in that He is willing to receive a drink of water from her hand, from a vessel that she will provide, because He has nothing visible with which to draw water. John 4:9 says, "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'"

We see what this says to the woman, but what does it say to us? It seems to me that through this story Jesus is saying that if

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we are having trouble finding something that makes life worth living and are thirsting for some living water, the first thing we need to know is that we have value in God's eyes. We are worth something to God. We can give something to God He desires. He desires to engage us in conversation, for us to pay attention to Him, to minister to Him by allowing Him to minister to us. The man with the tomatoes ministered to me more than he knows. It wasn't the tomatoes, though; though I appreciated the tomatoes, it was the fact that he had listened to the word I preached and was now willing to listen to me again that ministered to my soul.

At the end of the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, the disciples came back from their shopping expedition and were surprised to find Jesus talking to this woman. Then, after she left, the disciples offered Jesus something to eat. He refused the food they offered, saying, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." **The first step to living water is to give time and attention to Jesus. This ministers to Him and opens our hearts to receive ministry from Him.**

The second step in receiving the living water that makes life worth living is discovered in John 4:10 which says, "Jesus answered her, 'if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'" Once we have ministered to Jesus by giving time and attention to Him, and have thereby gained faith in Him, we are to ask Him for the real drink. We are to ask Him to give what God has planned for us, has desired to give us, from the foundation of the world. We are to ask Him for Living Water.

We read this further dialogue in John 4:11-14: "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 7:37-39a say, "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." Jesus says in Luke 11:13, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to

your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The action verbs we see in these passages are **come** (come to Jesus), **believe** (believe, put your trust, in Jesus), and **ask** (ask Jesus for Living Water; ask Him for the Holy Spirit to come and live in you). **We need to ask and receive that our joy may be full.**

If we want to possess what makes life worth living, we need to give time and attention to Jesus, believe in Him, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The third and final thing we are instructed to do to enable the flowing of Living Water into us and from us is to acknowledge, renounce, and forsake our sin. Notice where the conversation goes beginning with John 4:15-18: "The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'"

The content of these last verses needs no embellishment to bring it up to date. The chief reason we cannot find that special ingredient that makes life really worth the living, is that we are looking for it in all the wrong places. The woman of Samaria, like many women today, was trying to find life in the arms of men. She had gone through five husbands and then took up living with a man who was not her husband. And, for all of that she ruined her reputation, destroyed her self-esteem, and still came up empty.

But we must be careful before we condemn. Others take other paths to the same end. There are plenty of men who try to find real life in relationships with women. There are those who look for it in a bottle or in a needle. Others seek it in worldly success, fame, and money. There are hundreds if not thousands of things we will sell our souls and bodies to and for, just hoping for a sip of Living Water, hoping for something that will make our lives worth living. And, what I want us to see is this: Every time we do this; that is, every time we seek Life in some thing, some activity, or in some relationship outside of Christ, it is an act of spiritual adultery--it is sin. Whenever we do that we are just like the Samaritan woman who had five

husbands and then lived with a man outside of marriage. We are just as guilty and just as dirty as she was, because we are doing the same thing, sinning against God by looking for life outside of Him. If we want real life, if we want Living Water, if we want the Holy Spirit, then we must recognize, renounce, and turn away from that sin. **There is nothing in all the earth, no thing, no activity, or relationship that can make life worth living outside of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Real life is found in Him and in Him alone.**

If anyone here today is seeking for something that will make his or her life worth living, if anyone here today is thirsting for real life, living water, the Holy Spirit, then here are the steps to take: **Step One:** Come to Jesus, give time attention to Jesus, minister to Jesus by listening for His voice. **Step Two:** Ask Him to give you living water: He says, "Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full." **Step Three:** Recognize, acknowledge, renounce, and turn away from every substitute god you have been chasing and embracing. Take life from Jesus--from Jesus alone.

There are also some things we learn here about the character and nature of our God: We learn that the Character and nature of God is to care for the most desperate sinner. This woman was an outcast, the village whore, the one everyone else could point to and feel better about themselves because in their own eyes they were not "like her." It is the nature and character of God to care about her and for all of us who have committed and continue to be guilty of Spiritual adultery.

We also learn that the Character and nature of God is holy. He is light that exposes and chases away the darkness. We learn that the Character and nature of God is Life. He gives life, living water, that satisfies the deepest longing of our souls.. That Life is for anyone and for everyone who would come to Jesus and drink from His well today.

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John 4:1-26

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