

The Third Sunday in Lent
March 14-15, 2020
John 4:5-26

“Deliver Us, Jesus, from Thirst”

There is a whole new vocabulary that we now have that we didn't have a short while ago: COVID-19, self-isolation, social distancing, non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). With the coronavirus outbreak, now officially labeled a pandemic by the World Health Organization, we are all on high alert. We are taking as many precautions as we can here at church to ensure the health and safety of everyone. Please do the same and exercise good judgment about what to do or not do. Some churches have cancelled public worship services. Others have encouraged those age 60 and over to remain at home. With the information we have at present, we will continue to have worship services. Of course, this could change depending on how the situation unfolds in the days to come. We continue to pray for everyone impacted by the coronavirus, and that the Lord would bring this to a swift and complete closure. On this Third Sunday in Lent, water is what's before us in both the Old Testament lesson and Gospel lesson. Hydrologists, that is, scientists who study water, tell us that in the years to come the real challenge for our planet may well be adequate water to support the people who live on Earth. By the year 2050, it is projected that there will be an additional 2-2.5 billion people on our already very crowded planet (<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2014WR016869>). “Water is increasingly becoming a priority policy issue at the international level. The third United Nations World Water Development Report [*United Nations World Water Assessment Programme (UN WWAP), 2009*] warns, in an unprecedented fashion, that extremely serious consequences may result from the current inequitable, unsustainable use of water. Both economic development and security are placed at risk by poor water management. That is why the concern about a global energy crisis has recently begun to be accompanied by a concern about a looming global water crisis” (Ibid). That is a very sobering thought. How do we as human beings, created in the image of God and charged with the care of God's creation, manage these resources, including water, thoughtfully and wisely, not just for our use, but for the use of future generations? That is a stewardship challenge that is before us all. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us about a different kind of water; water that brings refreshment and new life not just to the body, but to the soul. Jesus himself is this Living Water, and this becomes the theme for preaching today. Our Lenten preaching series continues today as we focus on “Deliver Us, Jesus, from Thirst.” May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

First of all, let's see where this place called Sychar and Jacob's Well were located. Found in south Samaria, which itself was sandwiched between Galilee up north and Judea down south. Because of longstanding hostilities between Jews and Samaritans, pious Jewish people would not even walk on Samaritan soil, but travel from Galilee to Judea just east of Samaria along the Jordan River. Today there is an Orthodox monastery at this site with a chapel that marks the place believed to be Jacob's well. Jesus chose to walk through Samaria. He was tired and thirsty; it was about noon time, and it was getting hot. Most people were inside or seeking shade somewhere, but as Jesus sat by the well of Jacob a woman comes along to get water. This is a weird time for that household chore. Before the days of indoor plumbing and running water, women were the ones who went to get water. Most women came first thing in the morning and again toward evening, but not in the middle of the day. Yet here she comes, and Jesus begins to engage her in conversation by asking for a drink. Did Jesus and this unnamed woman meet only by happenstance? Mere accidental timing? I believe this was by divine appointment, even as the Lord brings people into our lives whom we may not have anticipated or planned for. But the Lord has planned for it. Jesus' request opens the floodgates for this woman. He blows her mind by telling her about the living water that he gives to anyone who asks him, and they will never be thirsty again (John 4:13-14). Now, the woman is really interested! She is looking to make her life easier by not having to come to the well at all and lug water home (John 4:15). But that's not what Jesus is talking about. So often, we

misunderstand Jesus in our own lives, too. We're looking for the quick fix; the 5 easy steps that will make our lives better. So often we're not looking for the promised Messiah, the Savior. We're looking for Jesus to be our personal vending machine. But what is it that we're thirsty for? What is it that will really quench our thirst?

Jesus did not get sucked up into the Samaritan woman's agenda, and he doesn't get sucked up into whatever agenda we may have, either. Jesus redirected things, and asked the woman to go and get her husband. When she said she had no husband, Jesus challenged her on this. As the promised Messiah, he brought her secret sins to light, even as he does with us. Jesus revealed that she had had five husbands and the man she was with now wasn't her husband. That's why the woman came to the well at noon – to avoid other people who would look sideways at her with raised eyebrows and talk about her behind her back. When the spotlight is on us and our secret sins are brought to light, what do we do? We do exactly what that woman did: we try to shift the conversation away from us in order to avoid embarrassment. But nothing is hidden from Jesus our Messiah who sees all. We fear judgment and condemnation, not only from other people, but ultimately from God. But here is the good news that we heard in last Sunday's Gospel lesson: **"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him"** (John 3:17). As Paul the apostle tells us in today's Epistle lesson: **"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8). This is what we are thirsty for: the good news of salvation in Jesus. This is the living water that satisfies us as nothing else can do. As Jesus tells us in the Scripture memory verse that we spoke together: **"But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life"** (John 4:14). That life-giving spring of water flows out of the gift of grace that God gives in Holy Baptism. In Baptism, everything that Jesus has done becomes yours: his life of obedience to the Father, his innocent suffering and death upon the cross, his glorious resurrection from the dead, his victory over sin and Satan. It all becomes ours in Baptism. In the cleansing waters of Baptism, the fear of judgment and condemnation that comes from our old sinful nature is washed away. We are given a new identity as children of God. That gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation first received in Baptism continues to bubble up like a spring of living water throughout our entire life as we daily die to sin and rise to new life in Jesus.

"Everything in this Gospel reading is wrong, and that makes it right. Jews like Jesus do not talk to Samaritans. Women do not come to the well alone in the middle of the day. Men do not talk to women they are not related to. Jesus breaks through all of these barriers to share the promise of living water" (*Sundays and Seasons: Year A 2020*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2019; p. 120). Jesus, who quenches our thirst with living water, calls us to share this gift of living water with the people around us. If there were barriers to this in Jesus' life and ministry, we can be sure there are barriers today as well. Empowered with the Holy Spirit poured out upon us in our Baptism, refreshed with the gift of living water, we go forth in Jesus' Name to confront whatever barriers there may be so that others can receive the same gift that we ourselves have received: the drink of a lifetime. And so we pray, deliver us, Jesus, from thirst. Give that living water to all who thirst. Amen.