**Lent 3 23 Mar 12 Jn 4 Living Water** reused from 2014

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Seated

The title of our sermon today is: **Living water for the Despised**

Our text is our Gospel lesson from John 4. The relevant portions are quoted or summarized in the sermon.

In our Gospel lesson today Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, going through Samaria. Samaria was sandwiched between Judea, where Jerusalem was, and Galilee where the majority of Jesus’ ministry occurred. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews and the Samaritans despised the Jews back. The Samaritans were the remnants of the 10 northern tribes carried off by the Assyrians. They believed in God and the coming of a Messiah, but followed the false teachings about God that Jeroboam, the first King of the Northern Kingdom had introduced and had mixed their theology with that of the Assyrians and had thus totally corrupted their religion in the eyes of the Jews. A righteous Jew would travel around Samaria rather than travel through it.

But Jesus travels through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem and at about noon stops to rest at Jacob’s well. The disciples go into the nearby town of Sychar to purchase some food. A woman comes to get some water. Now it is very unusual for a woman to get water at noon and by herself. There was no such thing as running water in those days, so each day the women would get together and go out to the closest source of water to carry some back to their homes. But they would do this early in the morning or later in the day when the sun was not so hot. Something has this gal getting water in the heat of the day by herself. … Jesus asks her for a drink of water. The well is deep and you need some type of container to lower into the well to get water.

The woman questions Jesus’ request. He is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. John notes that Jews do not associate with Samaritans. In fact a righteous Jew would not drink from the same container as a Samaritan had used. He would become unclean in doing so. And Jesus is breaking a cultural taboo in speaking to a woman without her husband present. Jesus does not address the problem the Samaritan woman inquires about. Instead he tells her in V 10 of our text, read:

**John 4: 10** 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.”

The woman is confused. Jesus has no container. How will he get this living water? Who does he think he is? Her built in resentment of Jews kicks in and she asks “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?”

Once again Jesus ignores the implications of the woman’s question and answers in V 13 of our text, read:

**John 4: 13, 14** 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.”

Now we have to pause in examining this text and ask “what is it that Jesus is offering to this woman?” What is “living water”? The prophet Jeremiah twice identifies the spring of living water as God himself, read:

**Jeremiah 2: 13** “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken **me, the spring of living water**, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

**Jeremiah 7: 13** O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame.

Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken **the LORD, the spring of living water.**

And later in the Gospel of John Jesus declares:

**John 7: 37** - **39** 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. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

So John clarifies that this living water that Jesus is offering this Samaritan woman is God the Holy Spirit. … Wow, now this is deep. A real teaching moment for his disciples. Because of the deeply ingrained theology of the Jews, including his disciples, they had no concept of a triune God, and no inkling that the Gospel and resulting Christianity was for the whole world, not just the Jews, Jesus is here doing something that the Holy Spirit will later remind the disciples of. After his death and resurrection the Holy Spirit will have the disciples remember this moment to confirm that the Gospel was to be preached to all nations, and would bring to their minds the writings of Jeremiah to instill in them a concept of a triune God. The Holy Spirit was living water and so was God! These concepts were beyond the ability of the disciples to be grasped at that time. Now back to our text.

The woman has no clue what Jesus is really telling her and replies - “Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” In her mind Jesus is offering her a real work saver. Getting water was a major task for a woman in those days. Yes I’ll take some of that she says. … Oh there is a catch in the offer. Jesus replies “Go, call your husband and come back”. This is not an unusual request in this culture. Jesus should not even be talking with this woman without her husband present. “I have no husband,” the woman replies. Then Jesus reveals why this woman is getting water in the heat of the day by herself. He replies in v 17 & 18 of our text, read:

**John 4: 17B & 18** “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.”

Busted!! 5 husbands and now not married to the man she is living with. In today’s culture of loose morals and no sanctity in marriage she could be a famous movie star like Marilyn Monroe or Elizabeth Taylor. But in her culture she would be among the despised and rejected of society. Divorce could never be initiated by a woman. Only the man could bring about a divorce, and it was simple. Just get another man to witness the divorce paper and give it to the woman. Divorce by a man was allowed for almost any and every reason. Women had absolutely no recourse or rights. They had little or no means of earning an income outside of marriage except prostitution or begging. After 5 times of not being able to keep her husband happy there had to be a major defect in this gal. Now she is living in sin with another man. Even in Samaritan society such a person would be shunned and rejected. No one would talk with her, let alone accompany her to fetch water.

But Jesus does not shun her, and not because he needs a drink. He would have been aware of her life situation prior to initiating the conversation with her. Yet he still offers her living water. Then he points out a problem. Sin prevents him from giving her this living water. What a way to introduce the gospel to a person when Jesus has not yet died for the sins of the world. He comes to this downtrodden reject of society and offers her eternal life, then points her need to have her sin dealt with first. Jesus did deal with her sin, our sin, and the sin of the whole world that first Good Friday. He accepted the penalty for all that sin there on the cross. Jesus also comes to all those who do not know him today and offers them the free gift of salvation, of eternal life, of the Holy Spirit, that is living water. But first sin has to be dealt with. Now; on the other side of Jesus’ death and resurrection this is accomplished by repentance. As God calls us to faith we are led by the Holy Spirit to turn from our sin in sorrow and contrition and to turn to God and accept his forgiveness. Just as Jesus reached out to this despised woman who was caught in sin, today God reaches out to all sinners, regardless of the depth of their sin with his offer of the free gift of salvation. As our epistle said, read:

**Romans 5: 6 – 8** You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the **ungodly**. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners**, Christ died for us.

The love of God for us sinners is unfathomable. It is difficult to comprehend how God can still love us and reach out to us with his free gift of the Holy Spirit no matter how deep in sin we have fallen. God’s love for mankind is unconditional. That love and willingness to forgive is there both before we become Christians and after we are Christians. After we become Christians God has provided the means to deal with our sin again and again through confession, absolution and the sacrament of communion.

What was the response of this sinful Samaritan woman to the love and acceptance Jesus showed toward her and his revealing to her that he was the promised Messiah? She leaves her jar at the well and goes back into town, witnesses the experience to those who had been despising her for her life of sin, invites them to come to Jesus and asks “could this be the Christ?” And the people of Sychar respond. Many believed because of her witness, and later even more believed because of what Jesus taught them over 2 days.

That love and acceptance the Samaritan woman felt is also the love and acceptance we should feel today as Christians. The love of God toward us today is still exactly the same love Jesus demonstrated in paying the price for our sins on the cross and atoning the wrath of God for that sin. Our response to that love and acceptance of God toward us should be the same as that of the Samaritan woman. We need to tell others about that love. We need to let others know that the love of God is unconditional, that the gift of salvation is free!

God will look after the response. Jesus said our mandate is to, read:

**Acts 1: 7B** you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.