

AMAZING GRACE: LIVING WATERS FOR ALL

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: John 4:4-42

How many of you were born with a green thumb? You know the kind of people I am talking about – those kind of people that can make anything grow! Raye Ann Beasley is one of those people – Raye Ann takes care of our flowers throughout the summer here at the church. And they are always so beautiful. She just has a knack for making things grow. I'm confident there are many more of you out there who have similar green thumbs.

Unfortunately, God did not bless me with a green thumb. I used to say I was born with a black thumb because I could so easily kill plants. Now, I say I have a brown thumb – because I may not be killing plants as often now, but because I don't always care for plants as well as I should.... I can easily make leaves brown or droopy.

But let me introduce you to Phoenix. This is plant that I have in my office. This plant didn't always look like this. It was actually quite brown, losing leaves – ready to die. And then one day, Donna Flicek walked into my office and asked – “What is going on with your plant? How can you kill a pothos plant?” I guess it is pretty impossible to do that – but I was quite able! Anyway, Donna asked if she could take the plant to her home for hospice care. And I said, “Sure!” Several weeks went by and she brought in this gorgeous, beautiful green pothos plant. I really thought she had bought me a new plant. But – no – this was my plant that Donna had really resurrected!!! How did she do it? Well, she trimmed out all the dead stuff – gave it appropriate amounts of water and sunshine – and talked to it! We decided to call the plant “Phoenix” – because it truly came back from the ashes!

Well, just like this plant Phoenix - you and I need that same tender loving care – some trimming out of what is dying and filling us with refreshing water – and someone to love us – with amazing grace!

And that is exactly what the woman in our story today - received in her grace encounter with Jesus one day in Samaria. Turn with me to the Gospel of John and we are going to look at the 4th chapter to hear once again the story of the Woman at the Well. This story is familiar one to many of us – but may the Holy Spirit move in us and open our hearts to hear some new insight or to reinforce the good news of God's amazing grace as we listen to the story once again.

The story of the woman at the well is a long one – 38 verses – and thus not one I will be able to read in its entirety today, nor comment on each verse. But it is such a powerful story, full of wonderful theological truths about our Lord – you definitely need to read it for yourself. So, much like I challenged you last week – your homework is to read all of John 4, to reflect and pray through this week.

Our passage begins with the words that Jesus had to go through Samaria, on his trip back to Galilee from his visit in Judea. Now it is important to note this little piece of geography. If

you look at this map, you can see where the white star is – that points out Jerusalem where he and the disciples begin their journey up to Galilee. Now almost every Jew would follow the path that you see marked by the blue arrow – along the Jordan River. They would avoid Samaria at all costs – because they wanted no contact with those despised Samaritans. You see Samaritans were Jews who had intermarried with Gentiles. They had their own pagan ways – worshiped at a different place than Jerusalem – and they had their own version of the Old Testament, which was just the first 5 books. So, Jews found ways to avoid interacting with these Samaritans, like going outside and around their land.

But not Jesus! Jesus' path is marked in red – going through the central part of Samaria to the town of Sychar. But why? I believe that Jesus went to Samaria because I think He knew a woman would come to a well, right at the moment He sat down, weary from his journey. As has been said, *“nothing happens by chance in this story – every detail is part of God's plan.”* And that is a very important point to remember as we look at the story. *“The woman isn't looking for Jesus – all she wants is water. But Jesus is looking for her.”* He didn't go along with the hatred the Jews had for the Samaritans and avoid them – but rather – He had to go through Samaria because he wanted to reach this one woman, and through her to reach her whole village.”¹

Let's pick up the story at verse 5: *⁵ Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime.*

That one word is important, “noontime”. Jesus will meet the Samaritan woman at noontime when she comes to get water. Most women would get water from the well in the early morning hours, when it was cooler. And it was also a time for socializing with one another. But this woman comes at noontime, the hottest part of the day, probably to avoid the stares and gossip of other women, who would have known her history of having multiple husbands and current adulterous relationship (as we read about in verses 17-18).

Look back at verse 7: *⁷ Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” ⁸ He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. ⁹ The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”*

I imagine that the Samaritan woman was really surprised to see a Jewish rabbi, sitting alone at the well when she arrived. But I think she was also shocked when Jesus must have looked at her with eyes of love (rather than hatred) and actually spoke to her. It was forbidden for a Rabbi to speak to any woman in public, even if it were a family member. But here He is, speaking to her, a Samaritan woman in public! She blurts “Why are you a Jew asking me a Samaritan for a drink?” She was certainly aware of the labels – the division and hatred – and she felt like an outcast. But Jesus could see into her heart and knew that her life was dry and shriveled up. She had come bringing an empty pot to fill with water – and an empty soul that needed the water only Jesus could give. If only this woman could drink of the living water Jesus was offering, then she would be restored and renewed,

¹⁰ Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.” The woman doesn’t understand – or at least, she misses the “gift” and “who” she is speaking to. She only connects with the word “water” and says: ¹¹ “But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water?” ¹³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴ But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” ¹⁵ “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

At this point – Jesus must have been moved with love for this woman – and wanted to give her that water. The woman was so close. But one thing still stood in the way of her receiving that living water – and that was her sin. Jesus confronts her by asking her to go get her husband. The woman doesn’t deny or try to hide her failure, rather she says, “I have no husband”. Jesus says, “You’re right – the fact is you have had 5 husbands and the man you have now is not your husband.” Can’t you just see the woman’s wide-eyed astonishment? How did he know?

She does not need to be afraid in the presence of Jesus. He knows all about her secret – but He still sees her with grace and wishes her to be free in that grace. Jesus accepts her as a woman, as a Samaritan, and even as an adulterer. And He does not look upon her with shame but with grace.

Jesus reaches out to all of us as we struggle with the sin in our life. He does not look upon *us* with shame, but with grace. He sees that we are, like the woman, filling ourselves with things that do not satisfy...and He convicts us of that sin that separates us from Him. Before we can be filled with the Living Water, we need to be cleansed from that sin. And Jesus promises that “*But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*” (I John 1:9)

The Samaritan woman and Jesus continued to talk – specifically about where to worship. Jesus said: “*The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.*” Now is the time? The woman wonders ... could this be a sign that the Messiah is here? So, she says, “*I know that the Messiah is coming and that when He comes, He’ll explain everything to us.*”

Jesus then said those powerful words: “*I am the Messiah!*”

What an incredible thrill it must have been to hear those words! This was no prophet. This is the Messiah – the one we have been waiting for. Can’t you just imagine her thoughts? “Here I am looking into His eyes and talking with the Messiah! He knows my story. He knows my hurt. He knows all that I have ever done. Yet He offers His water. Living water! Oh – I know I will never be the same!”

Speechless – the woman ran with great joy back into town. And she leaves behind her water jar - that symbol of all the old water and of her emptiness. Now she runs with the

newness of the living waters she has running through her veins, the gift of grace she has received from Jesus. For her, it was like Easter morning! She will run to the others with all the boldness of a new woman, with such truth and spirit that she still shakes and sheer joy. All her fears and her shame is now over, now forgiven. What lies ahead now is the life of living in that newfound grace and freedom.²

And what is so amazing is that this woman becomes the first Gentile missionary – telling others, “Come see – could this be the Messiah?” And many came to see Jesus and many, many people came to know Jesus as Savior of the world!

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! Amazing grace – living waters – given for all.

One more thought – as I come to a close – getting back to caring for my plants. One other problem I have in taking care of plants is that instead of not watering them enough -- sometimes I water them too much and I drown them! The water sits in the plant and stagnates and eventually kills the plant. Is there such a thing as too much of the living water that God gives? Well in a way, I think there is. Sometimes we can be so focused on our prayers and our Bible reading, that we can get tunnel vision. Our eyes are only focused inward and never outward -- closing our eyes to the needs of the world. Jesus calls us to drink deep of the living water and then let it flow out to others. Christ gives us love so that we might love others. The water Jesus gives is *living* water that flows freely -- it doesn't stay trapped inside stagnating.

Indeed, when Jesus gives us living water -- God quenches the thirsty, physically and spiritually. First God gives each of us a spiritual, invisible aid -- courage before crisis, comfort in grieving, clarity for decision making, strength for the future. And then through us, we go out to be His light and love in the world – where the hungry are fed and the thirsty are given drink. People like you and I can drink deep in the living waters and can be moved to tell others about the amazing grace of the Savior of the world.

Where do you and I get that living water? We get that living water by giving our lives to Christ and worshipping God each week. And each time we gather at this table we are nourished for the week ahead- our thirst is quenched by the cup of salvation and our souls are fed by the bread of life. Christ died for us so that we might live a life anew - filled with the living waters of resurrection power.

My friends the question comes to each of us today: are you thirsty? Do you know that living water of Jesus? Hear Jesus calling, saying “*come to the water, stand by my side. I know you're thirsty, you won't be denied. I felt every teardrop when in darkness you cried, and I stroked to remind you that for those tears I died.*”

PRAYER

INVITATION

All of us, every day of our lives, need a drink of God's living waters. There may be someone here today who is seeking that drink of living water and wants to give their life to Christ. Perhaps there is someone watching online that needs that refreshing water that only Christ can give. We invite you, today, to open your heart and accept Christ's invitation of life and love. Make a decision today to confess your faith in Jesus as your Savior – decide to become a part of this church family or make a decision to rededicate your life to living for Christ. Let us all ask for God to fill our cups and quench the thirsting of our souls.

RESOURCES

¹ Ray Pritchard, *"Samaria: the place Jesus must visit – John 4:4"*

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/jesus-christ/samaria-the-place-jesus-must-visit.html>

²Creative Communications for the Parish, "Amazing Grace – Lent Worship Series", Week 4: The Woman at the Well, 2023.

Anne Graham Lotz, "Just Give Me Jesus", Thomas Nelson, 2009.