

The Woman at the Well

John 4:5-42

(Seated at music stand with sermon text on it. Next to it are two pitchers set on a large decorated wooden cube)

Begin pouring water from one pitcher to another at the cube, begin speaking)

People everywhere today need to be filled.

At the same time people everywhere need to be emptied.

We live in an uncertain moment of paradox—

In which we require a spiritual process of deep filling—(keep pouring)

And intentional emptying—(keep filling and emptying)

In the same moment!—an inner movement in seeming opposite directions.

The process of emptying creating a process of filling!

The process of filling creating a process of emptying!

- **The filling we require** is this reminder every one of us **now** needs—

NAMELY!

Amidst the chaos and accompanying pain, loss and suffering that COVID 19 is spreading across the human landscape—there is—underneath—a vast SOURCE of creative energy, purpose and meaning on which we can rely.

From which— we can draw comfort!

An invisible, 5th dimensional spiritual realm **where we can assemble**—within ourselves—steady, renewable resources of power!

- **The emptying we require!** is an **equally urgent** reminder to each of us!
—to become intentional about emptying ourselves of—

All self defeating thoughts—

—self negating emotional states

—all self harming habits—

—and self destroying actions—

—even if we are used to wearing them like an old pair of shoes.

Filling! **(POUR)**

And emptying!.....

(Get up walk) Even in this disaster and emergency, you are still being filled.

The trees outside your window and door are budding once more.

The daffodils and crocuses are poking out of the earth once more.

Birds are singing to each other.

Someone has been kind to you.

Some person—some animal—some garden—has smiled upon your day.

As Howard Thurman pointed out amidst a mounting global catastrophe, “The stars are still shining.”

The universe is yet vast and filled with mystery and wonder.

Your personal act of courage in another’s desperate cause matters more than you know.

You can still run errands for God that God needs running.

As you notice yourself being filled, notice what you need to empty yourself of.

You can choose to draw out of your spiritual toolbox a certain garden tool!—put on your garden gloves!—begin weeding out of the ground on which you live your life— that familiar crop of spreading anxieties and fears.

You are grabbing hold of those weeds of panic!

Pulling up those weeds of hopelessness and despair!

Imagine yourself emptying the garden of your life of all self defeating thoughts, whether they have to do with your own fate or our collective fate.

Emptying can feel like exhaling.

You stop and you BREATHE OUT.

EMPTY your lungs of any resentments, regrets, revenges which have taken up more of your inner space than you are comfortable with.

It is you **alone** who can choose to take the reins of your unbridled fears and hold them— so they do not have racing in all directions at once—

—chasing them across the terrain of your own life.

Do you want to be filled?

Will you choose to be emptied?

These were surely among the questions that arose when Jesus came to Jacob's well!—There had a decisive encounter with a woman who came to Jacob's well to fill her pitcher with water.

This is the well to which the people of the Torah referred when they sang

“Spring up, o well, sing ye unto it!”

I would like you focus on **this** woman at **this** well now!

Put your imagination to work and picture her situation!—her prospects, the challenges she faces in life!

As we meet this woman at a providential, synchronistic crossroads in her life, see a person beginning to come face to face with a need to be filled.

In her case, the emptiness is five marriages, which have left her empty.

Now the idea of 5 marriages may incorrectly put her on a par with some celebrities, so it might be more useful to see her— as a woman of Bible times—more likely widowed/abandoned/badly hurt a total of five times.

Or connect her more closely to your own life experience by seeing her as someone who has experienced failure, emptiness, betrayal or hurt in several significant relationships in her life.

Most of us have experienced several ultimately unsatisfying relationships.

It could have been with parents or children—a brother or sister.

A close friend or a spouse!

Some other family member or close colleague you worked with where you parted ways and the trail has now grown cold.

Can't you see her more clearly now?

Imagine this woman simply trying and failing to meet her deepest needs for love, intimacy and companionship or camaraderie through several significant, failed relationships.

See her walking to the well now!— her water jar on her shoulder!

Suddenly she realizes that there is someone sitting by the well!— and not just anyone, mind you, but a man whom she has heard of—a teacher—an itinerant rabbi—who has created a stir in world and in the region where she lives.

Typically, barrier between men and women and between Jews and Samaritans, would have prevented interaction between these two people. But this encounter is atypical!

Some unspoken connection dissolves the wall that separates them.

And they have this intense, personal conversation

She begins to pour out her deepest feelings and thoughts to Jesus.

And then when Jesus makes this single, simple suggestion to her “*Drink the living water I am going to give you.*”—which offers finally a glimpse of hope and relief from inner pain!—she pleads with Jesus in a voice which, to me, is hauntingly vivid, contemporary and true.

“Sir,” she says to Jesus, “Give me this water that I may no more thirst.”

Her plea is a prayer really!—LET ME BE FILLED!—which ought to find an echo inside of you, because I suspect her voice has been your voice at different times in your life.

Maybe even right now!

Let me be filled!

Let me be emptied!

We are reaching the rich bottom land of this story.

What does Jesus promise the Samaritan Woman when she utters this plea?

He promises to give her what he calls “**living water**” that will never run out.

Now “**living water**” meant a lot to people of Bible times.

To them living water was running water.

Living water was the water found in an underground spring or a stream or a river.

Running water was precious, invaluable compared to stagnant water that sat in pools and holes and might cause disease.

To the ancient Jews, living water was pure, clean, and safe to drink .

When the woman at the well said, “*Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst—*—Jesus told her of living water that would fill her.

Where does it come from?

The well!

A source of water that continues to flow, no matter how often people come to draw from it.

It was so central to their lives, they sang to it:

“Spring up, o well, sing ye unto it!”

The water in this well is always available. **(begin again pouring water from one pitcher to the other)**

The water in this well is always emptying—yet it is always filling.

It is the Eternal Source!

You can always fill your pitcher from this well.

It is the well of the Living God!

Even in this difficult, cloudy, fearful hour, we are filled by its Creative Spirit:

“Spring up, o well!

Sing ye unto it!”

Rev Scott Myers, 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 15, 2020

Most of us have arrived at that crossroads where the substitute satisfactions no longer worked, or worse, they were leading to ours and others' harm, and we knew we needed to take a different path, but didn't know how!

“Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst!”

What is this living water of which Jesus spoke?
What is its source? Its content?

I want to share with you a personal story about how I found this living water. Then hopefully you will understand it better. I have told this story to only a few people. It took me half a lifetime to understand it myself. When I was young, and suffering terribly in an alcoholic household that was being driven into chaos and poverty, my only way out, other than studying and long distance running, was falling in love. And then halfway through college, I married my high school sweetheart. I was the happiest person in the world—though not even close to as happy as I am now. Still, this early marriage lasted less than 3 years, when she suddenly left, and in a brief time, vanished from my life. I was devastated and no longer cared whether I lived or died. It was during this time that I met Jesus in a little out of the way church, although at the time, I'm not sure I realized I had met Jesus. It was just a feeling.

Years later, I decided to try and find out what happened to her, but found only dead ends. Then one day, I started looking on the internet for her mother's name because it was an unusual, completely unique name. And there in front of me on the computer screen was her mother's obituary. As I read down the column, I was stunned beyond belief to find that she had been preceded in death by her daughter, my former wife. Through persistence, and the help of a funeral home, I got in touch with her siblings. They were very kind. They told me that she had left me because even though she wouldn't talk about it, she had concluded that we were not able to have children, and she wanted children. So she left. But then, not long after she left, she woke up blind one morning, which led to a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, which led to her premature death.

When I learned all this and started praying my way through the experience, I felt a healing stream begin to flow within me!—into me!—through me!—beyond me! The stream flowed within me for days and days. I will never forget it. It gave me understanding of this story of the woman at the well, at least it was sufficient understanding for my life.

“Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst!”

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What does Jesus promise the Samaritan Woman at the Well when she utters this plea? He promises to give her what he calls **“living water”** that will never run out. Now **“living water”** meant a lot to people of Bible times. To them living water was running water. Living water was the water found in an underground spring or a stream or a river. Running water was precious, invaluable compared to stagnant water that sat in pools and holes and might cause disease. To the ancient Jews, living water was pure, clean, and

safe to drink . When the woman at the well pled, “*Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst!*”, Jesus told her of living water that would save her.

But what is this spring or river of living, running water?

I take it to be the Spirit of Living God that flows within each and every one of you. And if you are persistent and prayerful, it is water you may discover within yourself—a kind of underground river or stream that flows within every soul. In Carl Jung’s psychological theory, the river is a symbol of the unconscious. In Christian thinking, the river is a symbol of the soul or the spiritual realm—the inner life—the realm of prayer, inner music, peaceful reflection where true satisfaction may be found & life’s most desperate thirsts satisfied.

If you find it hard to find this living water within yourself, then look to other women and men of faith today, throughout history and in the Bible, people such as the woman at the well or someone like Moses before the burning bush or Elijah in his cave listening to “a still small voice”.

Or perhaps this is someone in your own family, or someone you have known, an author you read, an artist, musician, or poet whose spiritual message speaks to you, the great prophets and seers whose voices speak to you even today of their discovery and experience of God within their own soul and in the course of their days.

There is the river at which we may gather and drink and no longer have to plea, “*Sir, give me this water that I may not thirst.*”

Above all, you may find this living water in the person of Jesus Christ—in the life, teachings, prayers, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whose answer to the woman at the well—our closing thought— is an answer to our unquenchable thirsts even today:

“Whoever drinks of the water that I give will never thirst again—forever!” The water I will give you will become a well of water within you, springing up to give you life eternal.”

Rev. Scott Myers, Pastor, Westport Presbyterian Church