

## ***“John: Well, Well”***

*Isaiah 12:1-6 • John 4:1-26*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 23, 2022

How long can you go without eating? Be honest. A day? Eight hours? Four hours? From the end of Sunday School until the end of worship when you can go get the refreshments? I know when I get hungry I begin to feel weak and tired and sometimes a little grumpy. The surprising reality is that you can actually survive without food for up to two months. Your body will slow down a number of processes to conserve energy and will convert stored fat to help you survive. Water is a different story. How long can you go without water? About three days, even less in hot, dry climates or if you are doing strenuous activities.

You need to drink between three and four quarts of water every day for your body to function properly. So it's no surprise that in the heat of the Middle-East that water was such an important topic in the Bible and in the lives of the people. In John 4, Jesus takes his disciples and leaves Jerusalem, heading back to Galilee. John tells us that when they came to the town of Sychar they stopped to rest at a well that had been dug by Jacob around 2000 years before. In an area without many sources of water, you can imagine how important it was to have this well.

Verse 6 says that Jesus sat beside the well, “weary as he was from his journey.” It was around noon. Just then a Samaritan woman came from the village to draw water. It was the job of women to get the water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. They would usually go either early in the morning or in the evening to avoid the scorching heat of the day and they would go as a group. There was a social aspect to the task. So we can learn a lot about this woman by the fact that she came to the well in the middle of the day and that she came alone. This woman had issues. She came at noon because she thought no one would be there. She was trying to avoid other people. Why?

Why do you and I try to avoid people? One reason may be embarrassment. Maybe you're embarrassed about your job or your clothes or your family or your education. Maybe you've done something that hurt someone else or you've done something you know is wrong. Shame is powerful and can shape our behavior in ways we don't even realize. As we heard in the story, this woman has a lot of shame. She has been married five times and now lives with a man who is not her husband. As a woman and as a Samaritan she felt like she had very little value to anyone.

At that time, Jews tried their best to avoid Samaritans. Not because of shame but because they considered their religion to be polluted and dangerous. This dates back to the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They were conquered by the Assyrians, who took many of them captive. At the same time, they also moved captives from other areas into Israel. The result was that the people intermarried and the Israelites began to practice a mix of religions. They blended the religions of these other people with their own. Many people in our culture today do the same thing. Samaritans at the time only recognized the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. They didn't accept any of the books of the prophets. So the Jews avoided them whenever possible.

Verse 4 says that Jesus “had to pass through Samaria” to get to Galilee. That doesn't mean there was no other way to get there. Most Jews took a longer route on the other side of the Jordan River just so they could avoid Samaria. When the gospel says that Jesus “had to pass through Samaria,” it wasn't a navigational necessity, it was a gospel necessity. Jesus had an appointment to change the lives of the people there.

When they get to the well, Jesus sends his disciples into town to buy some lunch. James

Montgomery Boice notes that they probably passed this woman on the way. He says that at this point in their lives they would not have moved out of the way for a woman, especially a Samaritan one. So by the time she gets to the well she has been reminded again that everyone hates her. Her ex-husbands hate her. The women in her town hate her. The Jews hate her. She hates herself. Then she gets to the well and here's another person sitting there who probably hates her.

But instead, he does the unthinkable. Jesus asks her for a drink of water. This is a bombshell statement. She is shocked. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" When it says that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, that's not a great translation. They certainly had some dealings. The disciples were off buying food from Samaritans. What they didn't have was *personal* dealings. And they would never share things like cups or utensils. Doing so would make the Jew unclean because they considered the Samaritans unclean. The woman, in her desire to be anonymous, reminds Jesus of the social relationship.

But Jesus doesn't bite. Instead he says, "If you knew who you were talking to you would have asked for and received 'living water.'" At the time, living water usually referred to water that was moving, such as a river or from a spring. It was considered better water than water that doesn't move, like a stagnant pond or a well. The woman basically says, "where do you think you are going to get this better water. This is all we have. Jacob dug this well for us. Are you better than Jacob?" Again Jesus responds with a cryptic message. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Now she's interested. "Give me this spring so that I don't have to come here to get my water anymore."

Like Nicodemus, she's thinking only about the literal, physical meaning of what Jesus said.

What Jesus is offering her is eternal life in his Kingdom. Unlike a well that takes a lot of work to get the water, the water from a spring just flows out. In fact, it's very difficult to make it stop. If you fill in a well it's gone but if you cover up a spring, the water will find a way out. Jesus says that life with him is like that. He takes a conversation about water and says, "you know what's better than water? Living water. Having the Holy Spirit in you. When you experience God personally it's going to be like a spring gushing inside you. Even when the circumstances of your life are difficult and painful, the joy that comes from a relationship with Jesus will keep flowing from you.

To help her understand, Jesus shows her that he knows everything about her. He knows her past. He knows her failings and hurts. He knows everything about you, too. He knows your hurts and your failings. And he loves you enough to redeem them and use them for good. But it can be kind of uncomfortable when he brings them out into the open. When the woman realizes that Jesus knows everything about her she does what you and I would do – she tries to change the subject. Twice. She says, "enough about me. Let's talk about theology and doctrine!"

She asks Jesus about the proper *place* to worship. God had chosen Jerusalem as the place for His Temple. But the Samaritans had built another temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria. They both insisted that the other was wrong. Jesus tells her that it's true that salvation comes from the Jews, but he's referring to himself. More importantly, he says that the time has arrived when "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." Let me tell you, when you experience God's presence personally it results in worship and worship means expressing your love for God for who he is, what he's said, and what he's doing. It is when we are truly worshiping God that he then transforms us. Worship is where heaven and earth meet. God is seeking true worshipers and he meets us in

our worship and changes us to be more like Christ. When we worship the risen Christ, we change our thinking from what *I* want to what *God* wants.

But Jesus says that true worship must be in spirit and truth. Worshiping in truth means that your worship is rooted in the infallible truth of the Bible. It is worshiping the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The woman once again tries to change the subject. She says, "I know that Messiah is coming and he's going to tell us the right way." Jesus drops an ever bigger bombshell when he says, "I am he." Literally he says, "I am I AM," the divine name of God. Worshiping in truth is seeing and proclaiming the truth about Jesus.

Worshiping in your spirit, then, means that you are worshiping with your heart, mind, and

soul. It means you are responding to Jesus' call to you and what has done for you. That's why we have a prayer of confession and an assurance of forgiveness early in our worship service. It's why we ask you, when you join the church or at baptism like we just did, to admit you are a sinner who deserves punishment from God were it not for his mercy in Jesus. Until you can freely admit your need for the Savior, you will not be truly worshiping him.

Do you know your need? Have you thought about it today? Do you know how dry you are? Are you aware of your great thirst that can only be quenched by the spring of living water welling up to eternal life? And have you told God thank you? For the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

*Amen.*