

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

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3/27/11
Lent 3
Year A

The Woman Who Left her Water Jar
To worship God in Spirit and Truth

Have you ever gone without *water* for very long? Have you ever been really thirsty and not have been able to get to *water* right away? Have you ever been uncertain where your source of *water* would come from and, if you found a source, was it clean and would it always be available to you? Have you ever been so thirsty that you were afraid that you would perish? Most of us, in these days of designer water bottles, that seem to be everywhere and frequently clutched at our sides, are no further away from a clean drink of water than our nearest faucet. We don't know what it is like to be without *water*, to be thirsty. And, most of us don't begin our day thinking about where our water is going to come from or planning our day around how we will attain it.

This is not true, of course, for people in many parts of our world-some in our own country-who struggle for better water systems that are clean and easy to access. This is certainly the case for our brothers and sisters in Japan, who are struggling with broken and contaminated water systems as a result of the earthquake and tsunami. In some parts of the world water is held as political pawn, controlled by someone or some group in power to keep others from having their freedom. Water is and has always been essential to our survival and without it we would perish, this I think we all understand.

But let me ask you this: Have you ever been thirsty for *living water*? And, if so, what does that mean to you? Have you ever longed for the *water of life* that will quench your thirst and desire to be made whole that is quite different than the water you drink from a *well*? Have you ever felt that the *water of life* has dried up and you can't find it no matter what you do or where you search? Have you ever walked through the desert of life longing for a way to *never be thirsty again*? And if you have found this water, have you known how essential this *living water* is to your life?

It was that essential need for drinking water that brought the Samaritan woman, from John's gospel today, to the ancient *well of Jacob*, in the Samaritan city of *Sychar*. What she may or may not have known as she approached *the well* is that her thirst was much deeper than her need for drinking water; her longing to have her thirst quenched was much larger than *water-jar* she brought to the be filled.

It was *noon*, near the hottest part of the day, in that arid desert land of Samaria, when the woman approached the *well*, with her *water-jar* in her hands, to draw water for the day. I think of her approaching, finding Jesus sitting at the well, resting, tired out by his journey, from the north country of Judea, and alone-as the disciples had gone to look for something to eat.

She likely would have noticed him but, not looked at him because he was a foreigner, a Jew, a man, and there were so many rules, laws and ancient feuds regarding non-contact between them, it would make our heads spin. She would not have expected him to say anything to her, and she certainly knew she shouldn't say anything to him.

But, it was *Jesus, sitting there beside the well*, and he was getting pretty good at breaking the rules by now; stepping outside the law, and opening the door for new ways that included so much more than the rules of exclusion and bitterness that kept people apart from each other and from God. So as the woman approached, Jesus simply said to her, *give me a drink*. I am thirsty too. I need water, just like you. It is as essential to me as much as it is to you.

The Samaritan woman, surprised I would think, at his statement, can't imagine what this man is doing, and says to him, *How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?* You know better than this-we can't talk-what are you thinking? Men don't talk to women alone; Jews don't talk to Samaritans, *Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans*, remember. But Jesus keeps right on talking-he is not interested in these old feuds and ways-and *draws* her in more deeply, turning his need for *water*, back to her need for essential *water*, the *water of life*, *the living water*, *the gift of God* that Jesus is offering her, that she cannot yet, quite name.

The Samaritan woman doesn't get it right away-what Jesus is offering- she still is wondering, who is this guy who is aggravating me so? He wanted water, now he wants me to ask him for water, *and he doesn't have a bucket, and the well is deep*, what is this all about? And still, *I wonder, where does he get this living water* he is talking about? It sounds as though he understands that I am thirsty beyond the water that I seek here today, but how can this be? Does he think *he is greater than our ancestor Jacob*?

But Jesus keeps talking; saying to her...those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

The woman still struggles with what Jesus is telling her, his words are hard to take, wouldn't you agree? But he cares for her, she is a child of God and so he keeps talking to her, helping her see that he knows her, revealing she has been married *five times*. This is not a commentary or judgment of her life, but a way for her to understand that he knows her more deeply than she has been able to get her head around. And, with this revelation about her life, she does begin to understand who he is- Sir, *I see you are a prophet*, she says.

But as she draws closer to him she gets, defensive again, caught in the rules and ways and says, *Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem*, bringing up the very old feud, between the *Samaritans* and the *Jews*, who have argued since their return from the Exile in Babylon about where they should worship. The Jews say Jerusalem, the Samaritans say Mt. Gerizim, in Samaria. But, Jesus is clear that the *living water* he is offering has nothing to do with where they will worship-*believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.*

So, do you hear what Jesus is saying, over and over again? Your unquenchable thirst, your endless questions and concerns can never be filled without *living water* that is God's word, and love for you. It is not about laws, or about old tired feuds; it is not about where and how we worship, how many times we have been married, or what gender we are. It is about going to the *well* that is Jesus, that is God, with every hurt, with our deepest fears, with every longing and concern, with every disaster, and war and leaving behind-like the Samaritan women did,- our *water-jar*, our unquenchable thirst, so to drink in the *living water*, the word of God that will flow through us and give us *eternal life*, that is *hope*, which is much bigger than any water-jar can ever hold.

When we do this-drink the *living water*- we can have our thirst quenched; we can be made whole and we can be healed, even and most assuredly in the disasters and deserts of our lives. And then, like the *Samaritan woman*, we can walk back into the *world* with *hope*, to our people and those we don't know, with that *hope* and say, God is with all of us, *the spirit of truth* surrounds us. We are filled with this *spirit*, which is the *hope* of the *world*. The *water* is here for us, it is plentiful.