

## 256 Living Water For You

*(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "Living Water For You", originally shared on March 8, 2023. It was the 256<sup>th</sup> video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bPHKaL2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)*

What if someone offered to give you a kind of water that would make it so that you would never be thirsty again? Would you drink it? Would you think it was a scam? Today we're going to find out how one woman responded, and how you can respond to the same offer.

Do you remember the first time you ever looked at something under a microscope? Chances are that it was in a science classroom, maybe in middle school, and that one of the first things you looked at was water. Maybe it was swamp water or water that had been stagnant and sitting around for a while. Maybe you saw life in that water, an otherwise invisible world filled with one-celled creatures and other organisms.

That is the opposite of what the Bible means when it uses the words "living water".

Snow has continued to fall in the mountains. There has been some success in plowing major roads and getting food to the poor people who have been trapped in their homes for 2 weeks.

This coming weekend, however, more rain is predicted, but that rain will not turn to snow. It will help melt the snow. And when it does, the water will come down in streams, cascading into and through the areas that had been covered with snow.

That **will** make what the Bible means when it uses the words "living water".

"Living water" means water that is moving, like rapids, like fast-moving rivers. "Living water" is found in both the Old and New testaments of the Bible in places like the Bible's book of Jeremiah, where God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah to the southern kingdom of Judah, just before it falls to the Babylonians, in **Jeremiah 2:12-13**,

*<sup>12</sup> Be appalled, O heavens, at this,  
be shocked, be utterly desolate,  
says the Lord,*

*<sup>13</sup> for my people have committed two evils:  
they have forsaken me,  
the fountain of living water,  
and dug out cisterns for themselves,*

*cracked cisterns*

*that can hold no water.*

Jesus speaks to the people gathered in Jerusalem for a religious festival at the Temple and we see, in **John 7:37-39**,

*<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" <sup>39</sup> Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

The snow looks beautiful from here. It's different when you are up close. I did a wedding once for a couple that wanted to get married in the snow, though no one in the wedding party had ever been in real winter snow and hadn't anticipated that it would be cold. So, we drove up Mt. Baldy in a couple of limo's until we reached the snow and everybody piled out of the cars for the wedding.

But, it was snow, and it was Mt. Baldy, and it was winter and the winds howled down the mountain, and the bride's wedding dress was blowing all around, everyone's face was red and teary from the freezing wind and as soon as the ceremony was over everyone jumped back into the cars to get warm. The pictures turned out great, but the actual experience was unexpected.

Living water is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit in the Bible. It is untamed, like the winter wind, like the melting snow. It's wild. It's the third person of the Trinity, the personal presence of God transforming, challenging, calling, equipping, and sending us through turbulent times on the course that leads to receiving eternal life.

The Holy Spirit is God. It is God's personal ongoing presence for good in the world. It is poured out, if flows out of the believer's heart, it gives us a foretaste of the feast to come in the fully perfected Reign of God.

It is within us. It flows like a fountain. It is active, and present, and powerful and alive. It brings life that really is life.

When the pandemic got to the point where we were pretty much confined to our homes, Sally and I decided to produce videos of encouragement that would provide a means to reflect on what it meant to be a Christian in the LA area and beyond. We called them "Streams of Living Water", because we were never alone in the Holy Spirit and, well, the videos were being streamed, get it? 😊 Those developed into a blog, "Words of Living Water", and a podcast, "Living Water Radio." Do we see a theme there?

In the main text we are looking at today, **John 4:5-42**, Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman, a follower of the Samaritan religion, at a water well about the nature of the Christian faith, about living water.

Samaria was a foreign nation in the middle of Israel. It had been formed, mostly, by the Assyrian Empire when it conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Assyria had mixed the populations from throughout its conquered territories. The result in Israel was Samaria.

The Samaritans had retained enough of their Judaism to look a little bit familiar to the Jews, but they were not Jews. They were this hodgepodge of religions. They were Samaritans.

Observant Jews were not supposed to set foot in Samaritan territory. Jews traveling from Galilee, where Jesus was based, to Jerusalem were expected to walk to the other side of the Jordan River and then walk around, the long way.

Observant male Jews were also not supposed to speak with a woman in public, not even with their wives.

So, what is Jesus doing in Samaria, talking to a woman who we find out later has a questionable reputation, with no one else around?

Let's take a look at the beginning of the passage, in **John 4:5-14**,

*5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)*

We know that our current rainy season will be followed by a dry season, and that all these green hills will soon be brown. Oops, sorry, I meant "golden".

I learned that when I first arrived in Berkeley from Wisconsin for seminary and a reception was held for first year students. I met a student from Sacramento who asked me what I thought of California. I said that I liked it, but that I was having a hard time getting used to all the brown hills.

She literally took a step back and said, "Well! In California we call them "golden."

Israel has a climate much like that of Southern California, though it didn't have irrigation back then. People had to draw water from cisterns that had stored water under their homes during the rainy season and from wells during the dry season.

Women usually went out to the local well to draw and carry water to their homes early in the morning, while it was still cool. This was a time when they could be with other adult women and exchange information and the news of the village.

We find later in this text that the Samaritan woman who Jesus has been speaking with at the well has been married five times, and that the man she was with is not her husband. Now, we don't know the circumstances behind these marriages. She may have been divorced by each of her 5 husbands, or widowed 5 times. But, given that she's out at the well by herself in the middle of the day, there is something to say for her not being very popular among the other women in the city.

So, this particular Samaritan woman came to the well and unexpectedly found Jesus there alone as his disciples had gone into the city to buy food. He was tired, and Jesus spoke to her and asked her for a drink of water. What was he thinking?!

The drama continues with **verses 9-14**,

*9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but 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 wanted that water. I'm guessing that she did not like going to the well at noon by herself, and that she was starting to realize that Jesus would mean more to her than avoiding shame and inconvenience. Much more.

Jacob's well is still producing water. I drank from that well when I studied in Israel for a semester when I was in college. Back then there was just a bucket and a ladle that everyone who wanted could drink from. I'm sure it's different now, but it does give us a strong image for what's happening with Jesus' revelation to the Samaritan woman.

Jesus is in Samaria to show that God's love is for everyone. Everyone.

You might have seen on the news that the Girl Scouts are selling cookies, and that this year they are selling a new flavor, "Raspberry Rally", which sold out at \$5-\$6 a box and is now selling online for \$36 and up!

There are people who know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

The cross is free, we can't earn it, but there are some who think that we need to pay for it, and some who want to control the product and inflate the price.

But the message of the good news of Jesus Christ is that our salvation has been paid in full at the cross! There is nothing more valuable, and it's free. It is revealed by the Holy Spirit, the living water within us!

How do we convey that message to people who are ruled by their failures, their fears, and their false belief?

In the course of their conversation, Jesus asks the woman to go and get her husband, and when the woman says that she has no husband, Jesus tells her that he already knows about her marital history.

Have you ever lived in a place where you were a religious minority. Well, I suppose that we all have if we are living as Christians in an increasingly non-Christian, even hostile, world. We seek to be more inclusive and accepting, even to the point of being reluctant to share the good news of the living water that gushes up to eternal life. We go along to get along.

That's why I think that the exchange between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is so shocking to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears. The woman deflects attention from herself and changes the subject. She calls him a prophet and points to their religious differences.

Jesus replies, in **verses 21-26**,

*21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

Sally and I attended the cathedral funeral mass for Bishop David O'Connell, the Roman Catholic bishop who was murdered recently, last Friday as two of the ecumenical and interfaith guests of the Archdiocese, Sally for her many years of ecumenical leadership in Southern California and I because I've gone with Sally to events so often that I've become part of the furniture.

Bishop O'Connell was remembered for his commitment to prayer, his work among the poor, and as a peacemaker. The congregation burst into spontaneous applause as his casket was wheeled to the place of internment at the end of the Mass.

There were many references to Bishop O'Connell's Irish background, some funny and some poignant stories told by his friends and family members, and a heartbreaking singing of "Danny Boy" at the end of the Mass by the cathedral choir.

But, right at the center of everything, as a physical reminder of why we were all there, was the cross, with the body of Christ hanging from its nails.

Jesus is the Messiah, fully God and fully human being, and the worship that we offer comes from within us, it is the Holy Spirit, gushing up to eternal life. The word "messiah" means "deliverer". Our deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil was accomplished on the cross.

Jesus does not mince words about what truth is. It isn't a proposition; it is a person. It is found in a living transforming relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

The disciples return and are astonished that he was speaking with a woman.

The woman, an outcast among outcasts, living a separate existence within Israel, and a seemingly separate existence within Samaria, returns to her village and fearlessly shares what she has encountered in Jesus, and that he might be the Messiah.

Jesus' disciples seem to be concerned only with Jesus' immediate needs. They do not see the necessity of his doing God's will and of the need of the Samaritan people for the good news of Jesus Christ that is greater than life itself.

Jesus refocused their attention toward Jesus' mission, and that of his disciples, and what was happening right in front of them. The Samaritan woman is telling her community about Jesus and the disciples need to get busy!

What's happening? The Bible reading concludes in **verses 39-42**,

*<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."*

What opportunities are right in front of us that are we missing?

What friend or relative is ready to hear our stories, the ones about how we became a Christian or the ones where we were challenged and remained one?

Who do we encounter in a grocery line, a sporting event, an outdoor restaurant, or among our neighbors, or anywhere that people gather where we go?

How many people do we know that have been stewing about their lives, isolated by our polarization and siloed social media groups, and need a word of hope about this life and the next?

You may have seen the maps that show how much of California is moving out of "drought" status.

What if we could make those maps maps of the work of the Holy Spirit moving our unbelief to our belief in the absolute love and grace of God for all people?

The Holy Spirit is everywhere, flowing like streams of living water, planting seeds in every heart. Who will name the name of Jesus at work in those hearts, knocking and asking to be let in?

I saw on the news once that 6" of moving water can knock a person over and 12" of moving water can sweep away a motor vehicle.

Living water is powerful, and the streams of living water within us that is the Holy Spirit is powerful. It transforms lives. It endures forever.

We don't work in our own power in this world. The Holy Spirit is our power.

Seek this water, this living water, gushing up to eternal life, the power of the Holy Spirit within you that opens your heart to receive the gifts of faith and the water of baptism and seek the reign of God.

The rain has come to bring life to the earth. The already-but-not-yet perfected reign of God has come in Jesus Christ to bring eternal life for all who receive it and live by faith.

His reign is seen wherever God's justice, that is, God's will, is being done in the world. We are called to do God's will in God's power in response to the gift of God's self within us, gushing up like streams of living water. This is the source of the hope that does not disappoint us.

The Holy Spirit is God poured out, poured out for you. Take him into your heart. And let the Holy Spirit become in you a transformational spring of water, shared with the world, serving the world, gushing out of you to eternal life.