

“(Living) Water Always Finds the Cracks”

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John 4:5-42

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.)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."¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."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."²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² 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."

Sermon

I invite you to take a deep and prayerful breath. Let us pray. Spirit of the living God you are already with us, but we asked that we might feel your presence with us now. Wherever we are. Settle our minds, soften our hearts. If we are scared, bring us trust. If we are tired, give us rest. If we are angry, bring us peace. If we are lonely, bring us comfort. If we are inspired and able, give us courage to act. Though we, your people, are so far apart, draw our hearts together to still be the body of Christ, the Church, you call us to be. Amen.

I have been thinking a lot about water recently. One reason is because this past summer when I was on a week-long canoeing trip with some of our middle schoolers, we were required to drink three liters of water a day. It was surprisingly hard and surprisingly worth it. I hadn't felt that good or hydrated in a long time, which told me just how thirsty my body had been for a long time.

The other reason is because a couple of months ago, one evening, while Lauren was upstairs bathing the boys and getting them ready for bed, I went to the kitchen to do the dishes, and as soon as I got near the sink, I slipped in the middle of the floor. I look down – water. Where did this water come from? I looked around – no spilled glasses, no tipped-over kitty water dishes.

And then I looked up. And there it was. Water. Dripping from the ceiling. I climb on a chair – I push on the cracked drywall, and even more comes dribbling out. It wasn't a lot, but it was still water. Coming from the ceiling. I quickly called my friend who knows things and fixes things. He said,

Let me guess: Is the bathroom above the kitchen?

Yes.

Are the boys in the bathtub?

Yes.

Is there space, a crack between the wall and the floor board near the front corner of the tub?

(I ran upstairs to check). Yes.

Yup. Happens all the time. You'll be okay. But remember, water always finds the cracks.

Water always finds the cracks.

Our gospel reading for today is all about water. Both physical water and our physical thirst for it, and spiritual water and spiritual thirst.

If I had to pick only one bible passage to lead bible study on for the rest of my time as a pastor, I just might pick this story of Jesus and the woman at the well. This story itself alone has such a deep well of meaning, that a preacher can keep dropping their sermon bucket into it and drawing up more and more preachable water.

To begin diving into this text, we have to understand a bit about the gospel of John's audience – the community to whom John was writing this gospel. You see, on this strangest of Sundays, we have a small but significant similarity to John's audience. They couldn't go to church either. They couldn't go to church and they too were looking for a word of hope and a sense of community. Now, the reasons aren't the same. John's community was facing the possible threat of a virus. Rather it is likely that John's community had been kicked out of the synagogue because they had come to believe in Jesus, while the others had not. And so they were kicked out. Cut off from their community. And so the gospel of John is written to a people that can't go to church.

The other thing we need to know is who a Samaritan was. Long ago, the people of Israel split into two separate groups, which eventually became known as the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews worshiped God in the temple. The Samaritans worshiped God on a mountain. Essentially, they are like cousins, descendants from the same sacred family tree, who don't get along and don't interact with each other.

Last week, some of you might remember, Pastor Pam's sermon was from the gospel of John chapter 3, where Nicodemus – a Jew and leader in the synagogue – comes to Jesus at night. And it is to Nicodemus that Jesus declares for God so loves *the world that God gave God's only Son*. Not - *for God so loves the Jews who worship in the synagogue*. But, rather, for God so loves *the world*.

And to show, to embody, God's love for the world, in the very next chapter – our story for today - where does Jesus go? He goes to Samaria. He goes the very place, the very people, the Jews had walled themselves off from.

So Jesus, a Jew, is going to go to Samaria. In fact, the gospel says he has to go to Samaria. But how is Jesus going to break through that cultural barrier? Well, water always finds the cracks. Where are the cracks in this wall...where can the water get through? And Jesus, the Living Water, finds the crack at Jacob's Well. Do you remember Jacob? Way, way back in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis, Jacob is the son of Rebekah and Isaac, who is the son of Abraham and Sarah. Jacob, who was named Israel after wrestling with God. Jacob who

felt like an outsider because he was cut off from his community. And yet it was Jacob who heard the voice of God say to him, “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.”

Jesus finds the crack in the wall between the Jews and the Samaritans at Jacob’s well. Jacob – where the Jewish and Samaritan branches of the big sacred family tree meet. Where they are reminded that they come from the same God and they are still connected.

And it is at Jacob’s well that Jesus meets a Samaritan woman, whose name we never learn. It’s noon. The sun is unbearable and Jesus is thirsty.

“Give me a drink.” Jesus says.

Immediately, she’s suspicious. As she should be. She knows the walls, the boundaries, the social distancing guidelines put in place between herself, a Samaritan, and him, a Jew. Who is he to ask her for a drink of water?

But then with his sharp conversational skills, Jesus flips the script and cuts to the chase. “Actually it’s you who should be asking me for a drink. I’ll give you living water.”

Still resisting this sudden intrusion and taking him a little too literally, the woman says, “Oh yeah? Where’s your bucket? How are you gonna get this living water, holy man?” You see, going to a well in the bible without a bucket is like going to Aldi without a quarter for your cart. You can’t really get what you need without one, and very few people are willing to share theirs.

But Jesus is patient and not deterred. He tells her again that this isn’t about physical water from a well, but spiritual water from God, water that washes and sustains. And those who drink of *this* water will never be thirsty. But rather it will become *in* them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." To which the woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water always."

And then Jesus seems to change the subject suddenly. “Bring me your husband,” he says.

“I don’t have a husband.”

“I know,” he says, “You’ve had five, and now the one you’re living with won’t even marry you.”

We don’t know why this woman has had five husbands, but Christian history has chosen to shame her and turn this into a scandal, rather than consider the possibility that this is about

the heartbreak of having lost and buried five husbands, cut off from any hope of a life she envisioned, and having no other family to support her.

Like someone who can see past all your defenses and who simply will not break eye-contact first, Jesus looks at her and says, "I see you. I know the parts of your life that have dried and up and begun to flake away. I know just how desperate you are for a soul-quenching drink of good news."

Water always finds the cracks and that was the crack in her life. The dry and parched place of brokenness but also the place for living water to enter in.

And then like someone who is trying to wipe away the tears and look more confident than they feel, and like a child who is still waiting by the window for the parent that hasn't come back for years, she says, "Well, I know that the Messiah will come. Any moment now. And when he comes...he will tell us everything."

And so Jesus tilts his head to find her eyes that have turned toward the ground, and says to her, "I am he." I am, he says. Somethings never change. You see, "I AM" - that's Biblical code word for the very name and presence of God given to Moses at the burning bush.

The present tense name of God: I AM.

I am present. I am with you, Jesus says to this Samaritan woman at the well, who has felt cut off in so many ways.

And then...after hearing *that* good news, with a spring of hope and joy bursting inside her, she drops her jar and starts running back to her people. She drops her jar because she doesn't need it anymore. She is now the vessel carrying the living water that has sprung up inside her heart. And when she reaches her people she shouts, "Come and see..."

Come and see...those are the words Jesus used to call his disciples at the beginning of the gospel. She gone from being a Samaritan outsider to full-blown evangelizer - an apostle of Jesus. "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

And I love that question. Because she has already become an apostle for Jesus, a fountain of living water, and yet she still holds that question. *He cannot be the Messiah, can he?* And could the fact that she is even willing to ask the question be the very beginning, the possibility of her faith? The very crack for faith to enter in?

Jesus talks to the woman at the well longer than anyone else in all of the gospels. Longer than his disciples. Longer than his adversaries. Jesus gives the majority of his time and his words to this unnamed woman from Samaria.

Last week, Jesus was with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader of the synagogue in the shadow of the night. This week, Jesus is with a Samaritan-nobody, outside the synagogue, in the brightness of the day.

Do you see the contrasts and parallels? The writer of John's gospel is speaking to his community, who couldn't go to church, through this story. They would recognize themselves in the Samaritan woman. You might be outside the synagogue, you might be outside the church but you are not outside the reach of Jesus. Maybe John is whispering to them through this story the very same thing God said to Jacob so long ago...."Know that I am with you...and will keep you wherever you go."

At the end of the Gospel of John, hanging from the cross Jesus, with a parched mouth, will whisper this interesting line. He'll say, "I am thirsty." I am thirsty. I like to believe he says this because the living water of God has poured himself out fully into you the people of God whom God loves so much. You, like the Samaritan woman, are the vessels, the carriers of living water now.

We put our faith in an incarnate suffering God. We are no strangers to fear and uncertainty and the worst that the world can offer. In fact, it is into that very setting that we are called to live out our faith.

Like water cutting through a rock, the living water of the grace and love of God will always find the cracks in life, to break through the barriers we put between us, to reach us with faith, hope and love.

Leonard Cohen is famous for saying, "There is a crack in everything thing. That's how the light gets in." Perhaps for today we might say, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the living water gets in."

We are in uncharted territory, Church. Situations like this one our world is in brings our deepest fears to the surface. Fears that there won't be enough of what we need. Fears that we won't be enough of what our community needs. Fears that in the moment of someone's greatest need, we don't know what the right choice is. Times like these have a tendency to hold up a mirror to society and we are not sure we like what we see.

As we are all trying to take preventative measures to seal up our lives from this virus, many are concerned about the good things we will be keeping away from the outstretched hands of thirsty people. Good things like human connection. Trust. Support. Hope.

But water – living water – always finds the cracks.

And during this time of social distancing, I'm watching God work through people to find the cracks. Cracks where the living water of God can safely and wisely break through and still connect us in love and joy.

Facebook groups are being created that will host a virtual hymn sing each day. Doctors and nurses and midwives and staff are calling in on their day off asking how they can help. Retired doctors are helping community organizations think through how to provide services while keeping people safe. People in apartment buildings across the globe are creating community choirs from their balconies. And youth that I run into at the grocery store are excited and planning to get out and help however they can because they know they are least likely to be affected, and therefore perhaps the best to mobilize.

Perhaps the hidden gift of all of this is learning just how precious the time we have around each other actually is. It is so common that we forget how much we need it. Being able to shake hands anytime you want makes it so routine that we forget just how hungry our skin can get for any human contact at all.

And so let's not lose sight of what is precious and let us heed the words and call to action of Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky. "Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise."

Beloved people of God, you are the Church. And as I look out at this mostly empty vessel, this empty jar of a sanctuary, in some ways I think we have been poured out. Pour out in love for our community. On this strangest of days, may God give us the courage and the wisdom to find the cracks where living water can get in.

Amen.