

The Cure for Thirst: John 4:5-42

“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.)^[a] 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,^[b] 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,^[c] 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,^[d] I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you^[e] 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^[f] will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You^[g] worship what you^[h] 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,^[i] 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,^[i] 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^[k] 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.”

This is the God’s Word. Thanks be to God.

LET’S PRAY:

Holy One, you are Living Water...the only one who will deeply satisfy our longings. Help us to be **here** now. Slow us down from the frantic pace that brought us to worship, from the to do list that runs through our minds... so that we might hear your Word for us today and respond to it as the Samaritan woman did...to engage with the Living God and then run and tell others the Good News. Open our ears and soften our hearts. We want to see Jesus.

AMEN.

Good morning, Newberg First Presbyterian Church! What a joy and honor it is to be with you today. I have such a fondness for this church and your pastor. I have had the pleasure of participating in a few of your First Friday spiritual retreats, I have worshipped with you (both in person and online) and I even worked in your library for a number of days not too long ago while my girls were at Camp

Tilikum. I have experienced you to be a gracious, theologically deep, missional, and caring congregation.

A couple of years ago, as I was exploring starting a new ministry, Pastor Chris was asked to meet with me as a representative of the New Ministry Team for our presbytery. I immediately knew I was in the presence of a kindred spirit. His love for spiritual formation and thinking about new and creative approaches to ministry were refreshing and gave me hope for future opportunities to collaborate.

Over the course of the last year, the ministry that God has planted in my heart has begun to take shape and at Chris' encouragement, I asked your session if Newberg, First would be willing to be my "sponsor church" for Shalom Collective--a ministry designed to gather pastors and faith leaders from across denominations and differences and to offer them regular rhythms of rest, meaningful connection, and healing both at the table and on retreat. Post Covid ministry is hard and statistics show that since the pandemic, pastors and leaders are burning out and leaving ministry at an unsustainable rate. And so this newly birthed ministry seeks to create space for SHALOM—wholeness, healing, peace. Collective—together. We are made in the image of a Triune God and so collectively, we most deeply experience Shalom. So the ministry is designed to gather leaders and create space for shalom.

Wholeness, healing, peace, connection... these are realities that the Samaritan woman at the well likely felt were simply out of reach for her. A woman committed to going to the well to draw water in the heat of day rather than at dawn with the rest of the women, truly believes that wholeness, healing, peace and connection are never going to be words she would use to describe her life. And this is why Jesus pursued *her*...he didn't expect her to come looking for him. He knew where she was and when he could find her and you better believe, he made sure he was there when she showed up.

You are in the middle of a sermon series on pilgrimage with Jesus. **This** pilgrimage story reveals how wide and long and high and deep God's love is for us and how very present God is to us when we are convinced, we are journeying alone...that we are forgotten outsiders.

Now I don't believe we can fully grasp the power of this passage unless we pay attention to what comes immediately before it...**because THIS story was written to follow another**. In John chapter 3, we are introduced to Nicodemus—a leader of the Jews who came to Jesus at night.

The contrasting details given in these two back-to-back stories about the woman and Nicodemus are not coincidental. Nicodemus has a name. The woman at the well is never given a name in this story. Nicodemus is a male living in a patriarchal society, and she is a powerless female without a legal husband. Nicodemus was a Jewish leader—a respected position that held him to an extremely high moral standard. The woman was not only a Samaritan—a people group hated by first century Jews, but she seemed to be a woman with a reputation—otherwise she wouldn't have been drawing water from the well during the hottest part of the day—another detail that contrasts with Nicodemus' dark of night appearance.

And then we have tucked right in the middle of these two chapters probably the most well-known, often quoted Bible verse in Scripture...you know the one, John 3:16... “For God so loved **the world** that he gave his only Son, so that **everyone** who believes in him may not perish but may have **ETERNAL LIFE**.”

So, what is the connection? “For God so loved *the world...*” Jew and Samaritan, named and unnamed, male and female, highly esteemed and disrespected, positions of power and powerless, proud and ashamed... this Messiah offers a cure for thirst to **all** who want it...because according to John 3:16, “all who believe in him may not perish but may have **eternal life**.”

Two weeks ago, when I was working in your library, one of the things I was working on (in addition to my tasks as the Communications Manager for the Presbytery, was that I was preparing a wedding ceremony that I was going to be officiating the following weekend. Just five days before the wedding as I was pulling into your parking lot, I was talking to the bride, finalizing the last few details of their ceremony. I told the bride, “You can anticipate that something will go wrong at your wedding—every wedding has at least one unexpected blip or challenge, but if you leave that day married, it will be a success...”

Little did I know...

As my husband and I began the drive to Hood River for the rehearsal on Sunday, June 2nd, I received a text from the mother of the bride asking for prayer...a fire had broken out just across the river from the wedding venue and they were afraid...for the firemen, the homes in the fire's path, the resident's safety and the possibility of having to cancel the wedding. For the next 28 hours, we prayed for that fire to be quenched... for the wind to turn the fire back onto itself and put it out. We watched as plane after plane and helicopter after helicopter dumped water

on the relentless flames that would not be put out. We needed the water to do its job... we needed the water to quench the thirst of that fire.

I kept peering out the window of the hotel, hoping...praying...longing for that fire to go out. I kept looking at the Columbia River and wishing it could just spring up and quench the thirsty flames until not even an ember remained smoldering. The fire was not extinguished during that wedding weekend, but the wedding was not cancelled, and they left the night married.

Watching those helicopters drop water on the wildfire was like watching someone spit into a bonfire, hoping it would put out the flames.

Similarly, Jesus knew that the woman's thirst for deep and lasting life was NEVER going to be quenched by the things she was running after. Her pursuit for LIFE, REAL LIFE was as successful as those helicopters' were at extinguishing the massive flames with their comparatively small buckets. Jesus knew that her life of isolation—steering clear of her community to avoid remarks and ridicule—was only making her thirstier. She was made in the image of a Triune God...made in and for community. Jesus knew she longed for more and knew she was made for more. But rather than **telling** her that, Jesus met her right where she was, in her every day, ordinary work... And instead of asking her if she was thirsty, **he asked her** to cure his *own* thirst.

I do this with my own children sometimes. When they were learning to swim, I would “accidentally” drop a pool toy in the water and ask if they could help me retrieve it. I would tell them that I didn't want to get wet because I was too cold. Can you help me? Or preparing meals...we all know that asking for a child to help in the kitchen might involve more work on the adult's end, but it is a life skill they need to know, so I often have them help me so they can learn how to measure or chop or bake.

Jesus allowed himself to NEED so that she could receive the Living Water that she NEEDED. Jesus allowed her to care for his immediate need so that he could care for her eternal need. She cured his thirst for one day, but he cured hers forever.

This passage is just one snapshot, one example, **one sign** (as John describes them) of the love that God has for God's people. Let's look once again at the contrasts between this woman and Nicodemus.

Nicodemus pursued Jesus. Jesus pursued the woman. Nicodemus was Jewish. She was a Samaritan. Nicodemus was the picture of righteousness. The woman was

“that woman” in the town. Nicodemus came privately at night so he could ask Jesus his questions. The woman engaged with Jesus during the day where even those closest to him saw and were skeptical about this interaction—and Jesus started the conversation. Nicodemus kept the conversation quiet and to himself. The woman...the WOMAN...yes, A WOMAN preached the Good News to her entire town and we are told in verse 39 that “*Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.*” Yet again, another Biblical affirmation of female preachers...

For God so loved THE WORLD...

There is SO much to unpack in a passage like this...we could talk about the symbolism of water as life; we could talk about the historic relationship between Samaritans and Jew and the parallels in our own country’s narrative. We could talk about what the harvest symbolizes and what our role is in gathering and reaping, or we could dive into Jesus’ interaction with and affirmation of women...

There is no way to cover all this passage holds in a 20-minute sermon.

So, I simply want to offer a few observations about what this passage reveals to us about God’s love...Because similar to our pastors and leaders who are reporting deep levels of exhaustion and struggle, I believe we all have been rattled by the experiences of the last few years and it doesn’t seem to be getting any easier. More than ever, it is essential that we are allowing the voice of Love to shape our sense of what is...so that we can continue on this pilgrim journey.

So, what do we need to know about God’s love today?

First, a close look at this passage affirms to us that God’s love is **limitless. It is not bound by religious belief, gender, status, who took the initiative or when in our lives we finally admitted we were thirsty.** God’s love is for all. Do I believe that includes even me? Are there people that I am unwilling to enfold into the community of faith? Who do I find challenging to love? Let us take a moment to quietly hold a face or name and ask God for the capacity to love **God’s world**...the insider AND the outsider, the named and the unnamed...if you struggle to believe that YOU are loved by God, imagine Jesus holding your face in his hands and looking you in the eyes. What does Jesus say to you about your own thirst?

PAUSE.

Second, this story reveals a love that **pursues us**. In her sermon a couple of weeks ago on Psalm 23, I was struck by the simple way Mary Kalesse described the loving initiative the Shepherd takes along our pilgrim journey. She said, “our pursuers are goodness and love.” How have I experienced the pursuit of God in my own life? When have I noticed the Holy One engage with me in seasons of emptiness and longing? When have I experienced being seen by Jesus? Who might Jesus be prompting me to see or engage with?

And finally, God’s love is the **cure for all thirst**. Like Nicodemus, we might be concerned with always getting it right. We might secretly believe that if we looked a certain way or acted a certain way, we would be more lovable—so we work and we work and we work, but we still don’t have what we are longing for (queue Bono’s chorus, “And I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”)

Or we might resonate with the Woman at the Well...if I could just be invisible, a fly on the wall, disengaged from community, minding my own business, I could live a peaceful life. God’s love is big enough for all of it. God’s love offers Shalom: wholeness, healing, peace. And God’s love is collective...it is for all.

May we, like the Samaritan Woman, experience the depth of this Good News and then run to tell others so that we all might drink deep the eternal cure for thirst in Christ Jesus.

Let’s pray.