

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Water is the indispensable element for life, most scientists hold. Chemical evolutionists claim life began in water, and, in fact, life couldn't have begun anywhere else. Water with its unique properties is the very medium that makes life chemically possible. Water sustains life; no living thing can survive without water.

That water is so prevalent on earth is not by chance. When God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was at first covered with water. Even before the Word spoke light into existence, the Spirit hovered "*over the face of the waters*" (Gen. 1:2-3). But then water figures prominently in the creation of all living things. Life was created after God had gathered the waters into seas and made dry land to appear (Gen. 1:9-11). And later, "*the waters [would] swarm with swarms of living creatures*" (Gen. 1:20). All that is to say that Christians surely understand the importance of water, for the Bible bears witness to it.

Of course, we use water to bathe; we clean with it. And, as we heard last Sunday, the Divine washing of "*water and the Spirit*" in Holy Baptism gives us entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). It saves us, "*not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet. 3:21). That is, by baptism, "*we have been united with [Jesus Christ] in a death like his, [so that] we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his*" (Rom. 6:5).

But we also drink water, as does our livestock. And by this water life is sustained.

Today, we find Jesus at a well in the midst of Samaria. Jesus was making a straight line journey from Judea back to Galilee. As He went, He came to Sychar and to a field which the patriarch Jacob had bought and had dug a well on it. From this well both Jacob and his sons drank, and their livestock drank (John 4:12).

Now, the humanity of Jesus is in full display in this account. It's easy to see, for Jesus was wearied from His journey, and was surely thirsty. That's not a God-thing. As Isaiah says, "*The Lord ... does not faint or grow weary*" (Is. 40:28). True man does, and even youths do. So Jesus sat at the well to rest, and when a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, Jesus asked her to give Him a drink of water. To be sure, the Son of God could have caused water to pour forth from a rock, as the Lord had told Moses to do for grumbling Israel — as earlier the devil tried to get Jesus to do, turning stones into bread — but He did not. In His humility Jesus hungered, and here thirsted, and did not use His divine powers to relieve His human discomfort, but trusted in the Lord's provision.

Now, it's not surprising that Jesus would encounter a woman at the well. It was a woman's work to go to the wells, draw water, and port it back to their home.

What is surprising is that Jesus spoke to her, at least, surprising to the woman. “*How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?*” And the Evangelist John supplies the reason for her surprise: “*For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*”

Remember, the Samaritans were descendants of the northern ten tribes of Israel that made up the Northern Kingdom of Israel. That Kingdom was overrun by the Assyrians in 722 BC (the Southern Kingdom of Judah, you might remember, survived that, but was eventually conquered by the Babylonians and exiled in 586 BC). Anyway, the Israelites still living in the former Northern Kingdom had intermarried with the heathen settlers brought in by the Assyrians. Their blood had been polluted, if you will, by the intermarrying. They were considered unclean. They were the despised Samaritans. Yet Jesus spoke to this one.

Another surprising fact was that Jesus spoke to this Samaritan who was a woman! That’s why John tells us that Jesus’ “*disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.*” They were not there to object to this breach of protocol. And when they returned, John reports their surprise “*that he was talking with a woman.*” Nevertheless, “*no one said*” anything to her or to Jesus. Not a “*What do you seek?*” or a “*Why are you talking with her?*”

Perhaps most surprising to us is that Jesus answers none of those questions, not the woman’s spoken question and not the disciples’ unspoken ones. Rather, He turns the woman’s attention to Himself and to the living water that He supplies. “*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.*”

Now everything depends on the first part of that statement: “*If you knew who’s talking to you ...*,” but the woman focuses in on the second part: the “*living water.*” She addresses Jesus as κύριε, but she doesn’t mean “LORD.” All English translations that I referenced rightly translate that as “*Sir.*”

“*Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?*” She didn’t realize: Jesus wasn’t speaking literally about water; He was speaking metaphorically. He needed no skin, no bucket, with which to draw water, for He Himself is the source.

For as deep as Jacob’s well may have been, the well from which Jesus draws water is infinitely deeper, for it is the infinite well of God’s love that flows out of His Beloved. “O love, how deep, how broad, how high, Beyond all thought and fantasy” (LSB544:1) ... love coming down from heaven to take on our mortal form for us, baptized for us, fasting and hungering for us, tempted for us, praying for us, doing signs and wonders for us, betrayed for us, shamed for us, hung upon a cross for us, dying for us, rising for us, ascending for us, sending His Spirit for us ... for

us sinners. As St. Paul proclaims in our Epistle: *“while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

God’s love is the well, and His Beloved supplies the living water. It flows from Jesus, as He would later tell the people: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and let him, who believes in me, drink, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”* (John 7:37-38). Living water is the water that Jesus gives. Drink of this water, He says, and that person *“will never be thirsty again, [for the] water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

Thus, Jesus is here leading the woman to this water, but she doesn’t yet understand. She knows she wants it, but she hasn’t yet focused on the first part of Jesus’ earlier statement . . . knowing who He is. κύριε, *“Sir,”* again she calls Him, *“give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”*

But she is now ready to understand and receive what Jesus is teaching her. He now leads her to the confession of who He truly is. Jesus tells her about her husbands and about the one she’s currently with who is not her husband. How could He know that? He must be a prophet, she thinks. She’s moving in the right direction.

Jesus turns her attention to the proper worship of God. It’s not about worshiping on Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion, where Jerusalem is, but about worshiping *“the Father in spirit and truth.”* And that means understanding that *“salvation is from the Jews.”* The *“Messiah . . . (he who is called Christ)”* would come from the Jews. Those are the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, to David, and ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. True worship of the Father means coming to Him through the Son. The woman began to understand that Jesus was talking about the Messiah, and Jesus told her: *“I who speak to you am he,”* surely to her glee.

When Jesus’ disciples returned, the woman went back to town. In fact, she was so excited that she *“left her water jar”* there at the well. She told the people: *“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”* Yes, she had begun to drink deeply of the living water that had flowed from Jesus, and she herself had become *“a spring of water welling up to eternal life,”* from which also flowed more living water. For the people received her words and went out to see Jesus. Many believed in Jesus because of the woman’s words, and they went to the Source Himself, and drank deeply from the living water that flowed from Him.

Now these townspeople had come to know who was speaking to them—and I think the woman realized it, too. More than a prophet, more than the Christ, “*we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.*” “He gives us living water.”

This story is our story in all the essentials. Baptized by water into Him, we encounter the love of God. The Beloved teaches us by His Word — living water — and convinces us of who He is — Christ, our Savior, and what He gives — living water. By Absolution and the supper of His body and blood — more living water, we are built up in our faith that Jesus is our savior and rejoice in our rescue from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We confess Him as our God and Lord and go forth to share this good news with others, assured that as we continue to drink deeply of this living water, it “*will become in [us] a spring of water welling up to eternal life,*” and we will be taken at the last to our heavenly home, where we “*will thirst no more,*” and we will be guided by the Jesus Himself “*to springs of living water*” (Rev. 7:16-17).

Let us, therefore, heed Jesus’ own invitation. “[L]et the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22:17). You’re in the right place for it.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.