

Third Sunday in Lent - March 8, 2026

- Exodus 17:1-7 - Psalm 95 - Romans 5:1-11 - John 4:5-30,39-42

“Living Water”

1. Water is life. Driving out in the country down a highway in Northeast Mexico, where I grew up, you mostly see a very dry landscape with vegetation that can survive with little water.
  - a. Little bushes, sturdy wiry trees
  - b. But sometimes, at a distance, you may see clusters or meandering lines of tall green trees, which of course signal that they happen to be near plentiful water
    - i. A small creek perhaps or some underground water
  - c. Water has always been a precious, scarce resource in my hometown of Monterrey, situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, with limited rainfall, so we have had to divert rivers and build large dams to sustain the millions of people living in the area.
2. Water is life. In the land of Samaria, where our Gospel story takes place, water was of course a precious resource.
  - a. Average rainfall in Samaria is actually similar to that of my hometown, which for comparison is about half of what we get here in Columbus
  - b. But the real water story is actually all under the surface of the area called Samaria “The Western Aquifer Basin is the most productive water basin in Israel and Palestine, yielding the highest-quality water in the area. The aquifer formation extends from the western slopes of the West Bank, through large parts of Israel to the north of the Sinai Peninsula.” (Source: Water Inventory)
  - c. And it bears making a modern reference here, because with the current Israeli political apartheid in the Palestinian West Bank, as both Israel and Palestine share this aquifer, Israel limits the water access to Palestinians, so today Israel gets “94% of its water, while Palestinians abstract only 6%.” (Source: Water Inventory)
3. Water is life, and in the context in the Bible story, we hear a conversation about water as life in the physical and spiritual sense
  - a. There is a lot to this Samaritan woman that runs below the surface
    - i. She goes fearlessly head-to-head in conversation with Jesus, initially with a combative tone, but eventually with an open and curious tone
      1. She’s very knowledgeable of her theology and her traditions

2. As she mentioned in the passage, there is a historic religious and political animosity between Samaritans and Jews
  3. Jews and the Samaritans had different ideas of where it was proper to worship God, each arguing they had the only right interpretation of the same scriptures
  4. Jesus stopping at this well represents making stop in hostile territory, until Jesus creates common ground with them.
- ii. Perhaps you wonder about the mention of the five husbands, or the idea that she came at an unusual time to get water (noon)
    1. A professor suggests that the way in which the townspeople readily heard her story about Jesus and believed in him because of her, leads us to believe that she was respected
    2. So, any modern intent to spotlight the number of husbands she had in order to shame her fails to recognize her true role in this story and in her community
    3. Finally, if Nicodemus came at night hiding his tentative faith, she's out in the noon time sun as she quickly journeys from doubt to belief
- b. The Samaritan woman is a remarkable character, and it's terrible that we as a Christian tradition don't give her more credit
    - i. The Samaritan woman is truly a teacher / preacher! She's a big deal!
    - ii. The dialogue she and Jesus engage in is the back and forth biblical discussion you'd expect of two teachers of the law trying to discern the meaning of the scriptures
    - iii. We should follow the example of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which highlights her contribution to the faith
      1. She is given a name (though the Bible doesn't give us that detail): Photini – meaning enlightened.
      2. they celebrate her ministry on the fourth Sunday after Easter.
- c. Of course, just like the Nicodemus story last week, today we also get a two-level dialogue and play on words with Jesus in this story
    - i. With Nicodemus was all about wind – Spirit
    - ii. Here it's about well water and living (running) water
      1. The term “living water” is the expression to refer to the water in a river, which moves, and is preferable to well water, which is considered as not moving (never mind aquifers have currents)
      2. So at the start of the conversation, the Samaritan woman is at first repelled by this enemy talking to her, and annoyed that he

was trying to offer her “better” water than what she had (that’s why she accuses him of pretending to be better than Jacob, who gave them this well)

3. Think of it like Jesus saying: “May I have a bottle of water?” And following that up with “I will give you the Colorado river”
  4. Of course Jesus was meaning water that gives life, and it’s worth seeing how quickly the Samaritan woman puts two and two together and enters the spiritual / religious level of the conversation.
  5. When he tells her about her husbands (and she calls him a prophet), she boldly takes the opportunity to ask this prophet about their central conflict (where to worship God), and SHE publicly places her faith on the coming Messiah, who will clear up all things.
  6. See that? SHE brings up Messiah. HE then says: that’s ME.
  7. I continue to marvel at this brief moment of self-revelation with a person who otherwise would have been dismissed, underestimated or attacked by any other Jewish teacher (including Jesus’ disciples!)
  8. That’s how big a deal this moment is.
- iii. And what follows is that she runs to tell others.
1. I picture another woman later in this gospel, Mary Magdalene, also running to tell the disciples about seeing the risen Jesus on Easter morning
  2. Because of the Samaritan woman, a whole town believes in Jesus (and many “more” believed as well once they met Jesus)
  3. And then Jesus accepts their hospitality. Again, remember, it had been enemy territory. But no longer...
4. Throughout Lent, as we look at encounters people had with Jesus, I am struck that Jesus showed compassion and openness, allowing an unexpected story to unfold.
- a. What the Samaritan woman did is an example to all of us: going to tell others about life, the real life which only comes from God
  - b. If you’ve only seen water coming in a bottle, imagine your shock at seeing a flowing river or a massive ocean
  - c. So it is with really experiencing God’s love.
    - i. If all people reduce God’s love to praying the right prayer in order to get what we want, what a narrow way to see God!
    - ii. we get a little taste of what God’s realm is about

- iii. We get a little taste of what God's realm is about when we can be open to the way God's love breaks down human barriers, flattens power structures, and invites all to take part of real community,
- iv. Which then poses this challenge for us: what do we do with that information or that feeling?
- v. We follow the Samaritan woman's reaction to Jesus, dismantling her internal bias, immediately sharing what she had discovered, and seeking to create a new community where old grudges vanish.
- d. Just imagine sworn enemies putting down weapons, no longer cursing the other, but opening hearts and minds, welcoming and loving ALL.
  - i. No wonder she ran to share that news.
- 5. Water is life. And the water Jesus shares redefines living. I feel like we should all be lacing up running shoes and sprinting out of here to embrace and share God's vision of real life.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-john-45-42-7>

<https://www.timeanddate.com/weather/@284584/climate>

<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Samaria>

<https://waterinventory.org/sites/waterinventory.org/files/chapters/Chapter-19-Western-Aquifer-Basin-web.pdf>

<https://womensordinationcampaign.org/blog-working-for-womens-equality-and-ordination-in-the-catholic-church/2020/2/26/0lxuekybneo4kr4naxadcjzjcgejdag#:~:text=On%20February%2026%2C%20the%20Eastern,best%20patrons%20for%20women's%20ordination.>

### Reflection questions

1. Share a personal story about a river (may be a pleasant childhood memory, or a traumatic memory of the 2008 flood).
2. In John 4, Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for (well) water, and offers her (living/running) water. Describe the progression of the Samaritan woman from surprise at the encounter to believing he is the Messiah to bringing people to Jesus.
3. What have been set backs and moments of growth in your own journey of believing in Jesus?