

A Spring Welling Up to Eternal Life

Lent 3

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John 4:5-30; 39-42

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last summer, my family and I went to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. The cave was so large that it had several tours which could be done, exploring different sections of it. Due to the timing of our arrival, my mom, dad, and I took the drier tour with stalactites and stalagmites. Yet it is the other tour which I remembered in preparing this sermon.

The tour my parents and I took was drier because the second one was rafting down an underground waterway inside of the cave. I don't have much experience with caves or waterways, so it makes me wonder how many underground rivers there might be in the world. Especially after the Greek study Pastor Emrick from St. Peter did last week.

Most weeks, a few pastors and I get together to study the Greek of one of either the Epistle or Gospel texts for an upcoming Sunday. When Pastor Emrick led, he told us how he found that the word for Jacob's well in our Gospel text likely referred to an underground waterway which was in motion, like the one at Mammoth Cave. The Greek literally can be translated as "fountain," and the ESV Study Bible notes that the well was likely deep enough to reach an underground spring.

Keep this in mind as we look at our Gospel text, where we hear about Jacob's well, living waters, what Jesus really meant when He spoke to the Samaritan woman, and what His Word means for us today.

Verse 1

Our text begins saying, "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" At first, the woman is surprised because Jesus would talk with her because she is not only a Samaritan and He was a Jew, but also because she was a woman. But "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.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?'"

Did you hear it this time, with Pastor Emrick's findings on your mind? The Samaritan woman was rightly confused about the living water because Jacob's well was living, or, in motion. She couldn't understand how Jesus was offering to give her water when He had no pail or bucket with which to draw the water from the well. More than that, the well, according to archaeological findings, was likely the deepest well in Jerusalem, as the Samaritan woman points out that it was indeed deep.

But as God has done in bringing us to His Word and faith in His Word, Jesus explained His meaning to the woman. He said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

With these words, Jesus leads the Samaritan woman closer to the truth of His identity; and slowly but surely throughout this passage, the woman begins to understand. At first she is confused by His speaking with her; then she doubts that He is greater than her ancestor Jacob; but after these words, she desires to drink of this living water. And again, Jesus gently leads her to understanding about His identity. He reveals it by showing

that He knows her, just as He knew Nathanael who had been seated under the fig tree when he was called to come and see.

Is this not how Jesus has worked in your life? Has He not patiently and lovingly led you by His Word to understand who He is as the Savior—even your Savior? Jesus spoke to the woman His Word and the Spirit went into her so that she could not only understand that He meant that He was a prophet of God, but that He was the Messiah who was to come, as she would tell her neighbors in the next verses which we will consider.

Verse 2

After revealing that He knew her, the Samaritan woman “said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’...So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’”

Up to this point, Jesus had been speaking with the woman, giving her and implanting in her living water. Here we find that water welling up in her. She could not keep His presence to herself; she had to tell her neighbors. Just like Philip calling Nathanael at the beginning of John’s Gospel to “‘Come and see,’” now the Samaritan woman says, “‘Come, see.’” The living water of the Holy Spirit had begun welling up in her so that she would go and bring others to Jesus.

Today, you have been called by the Gospel and enlightened with God’s gifts. You have seen how Jesus came to you with both Law and Gospel. Whether God came to you as an infant or older, you likely heard the Word, and the Law which showed you your guilt—even if it was only in the opening hymn before you were baptized as an infant. Yet Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. He came to save you from your sin, and by His death on the cross, you have been. Then, through the washing of baptism, you received the forgiveness paid for by Jesus on the cross.

Now you are free to spread the Word. The living water has been spoken into you—not the water of an underground stream like at Jacob’s well, but that same water which welled up in the Samaritan woman until she could no longer hold it in but had to go and tell others.

Verse 3

Once she had spoken to them, “(t)hey went out of the town and were coming to him...Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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 indeed the Savior of the world.’”

So here we have even a second example of Jesus’ Word welling up: not only did the woman hear, believe, and tell others, but the others also, so that the Word was passed from them on to even more others, until, as the text says, “many more believed because of (Jesus’) word.” They even declared Jesus to be “‘the Savior of the world.’”

This title is significant for a couple reasons. Jesus came to save not only the Jews, but all people, as He demonstrated by striking up the conversation with a Samaritan woman. Jesus came to save *the world* from their sins, not just one group or race. Yet, as much as this should have resonated through the Temple with how even Rahab had come to believe in the Messiah to come when she was a Gentile, Jesus received a greater welcome

here among the Samaritans than in Jerusalem, the location of the Temple, as we heard a few minutes ago. Here Jesus was asked to stay—something which did not take place in Jerusalem.

So Jesus stayed two more days, preaching and teaching, patiently working with the Samaritans with Law and Gospel. He gave them the Law to produce proper guilt, and those who believed His Word came to recognize Him as the “Savior of the world.” Each of them believed and so they would have known that Jesus was not only there to save the world, but each of them personally from their sin, just as He has shown you through His Word that He came to save you personally from your sin. As you hear and believe on that Word, don’t be surprised if you begin to feel the need to tell others. Jesus’ Word tends to well up in people, welling up to the spreading of the Gospel, and, at the proper time, eternal life. That is God’s gift for the sake of your Savior, Jesus the Christ.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.