Sermon :: 08-Mar-2026
Lent 3, Year A

" 'Sir, give *me* this water!' "

The woman at the well.[1]

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I had *no* intention of staying *with* Him when He first sat down beside me … thinking He only wanted something *from* me. I had *every* intention of returning *to* Him after I'd departed … thinking I needed so much *more* of what He offered. And when I opened my mouth to tell my people *of* Him … I realized I'd already been filled to the *brim*.

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You ever have one of those days when everything's going along just fine … *mood:* calm; *tasks:* getting done; *outlook:* sunny … and then, you turn a random corner … and it all goes *south*. Well, that's the way it was for *me,* that day. It was around noontime. I'd been up for hours … taking care of the children (who'd been especially well behaved!), tending to the garden (which, for once, wasn't a thicket of weeds), kíbbitzing with the neighbors (who'd just gotten home from a long journey). Before I knew it, it was time to go down to the community well and fetch water for the evening's washing-up and supper. So, I got my big jar from the corner … balanced it on my head—marveling, as always, how much lighter it was *empty* than *full!* … and set out for the well. I think I might even have been *whistling* on way!

But then everything came to a sudden halt … when I saw *Him* sitting there. First off, He was a *man*. Now *you* might not think anything of this … but back in *my* day, women—particularly *unmarried* women—just didn't socialize with men. I probably *should* have stood away, at a distance, until He left … but I had things to *do:* Maybe I could just make a quick 'dip' … get the water I needed … and be on my way, without more than a curt nod in His general direction.

But no! He had to *talk* to me—ask me for a *drink!* Now I was *trapped*. I couldn't deny water to a thirsty traveler, who had no way to draw from our deep well … and so, I'd have to be sociable—or, at least, *civil*—with Him. Then, as I turned to *look* at Him, I saw from His garb that he was a *Jew* … and I heard that Galilean inflection in His voice when he spoke: They're *all* Jews up there. *This* certainly wasn't good news! The Samaritans and Jews hadn't gotten along with each other for a *very* long time: The Jews thought we Samaritans had usurped *their* land[2] … we thought they'd pasted extra books onto the Bible that *Moses* hadn't written[3] … and *both* of us thought the *other* worshipped God

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[1] By tradition, her name is Photini ("The Enlightened One"). She is the first person in the Gospel according to St John to call Jesus "Messiah" and to evangelize others in this teaching. The Episcopal Church commemorates her in our calendar of saints on February 26.

[2] *I.e.,* back in the time of the Babylonian exile (the late fourth century BCE). The Samaritans lived mostly in the land of the former Northern Kingdom (called "Israel"), which had been obliterated—literally lost to history—in the late eighth century BCE. When the Babylonians showed up in the surviving *Southern* Kingdom ("Judah") a few centuries later, they deported about half of the Jews who were living there, but they didn't bother the Samaritans, who, during the ensuing exile, expanded into formerly Jewish lands.

[3] For the Samaritans, Holy Scripture comprised the first five books of the (Old) Testament, the Torah, only.

the wrong way.[4] So, not only was He a *man* … a *strange* man … but also a strange *Jewish* man. If anyone had seen me speaking with Him, I could have been ridden out of town on a rail!

But the funny thing *is:* The more He *spoke* … the more I couldn't *help* but *listen* to Him! At first, I thought He was talking about *actual water:* enticing me with a promise of perpetual fresh, running water that would relieve me of my dry-and-dusty daily trips to the well. He might have something to *give* me, I thought … and so, I kept on *listening*.

But then He got kind of *spiritual—religious,* even. Clearly, He had *some* sort of connection to God, since He knew more about *me* than *I'd* ever told *anyone*.[5] So when He started saying that God didn't really care about 'Jew' VERSUS 'Samaritan' … about who worshipped on 'this' mountain and who on 'that' one[6] … He sounded like He was *on* to something. He might have something to *teach* me, I thought … and so, I kept on *listening*.

But *then, candidly?,* He got a little *weird!* When I brought up the idea of the Messiah, Whom we'd *all* been waiting for, for a long, long time … He claimed *He* was the Messiah … the Savior … the Liberator … the Maker-of-Right and Healer-of-Ill. *Whoa* there!! *This* was a bridge too *far*.

Now … I don't know whether it was the earnestness of His *eyes* or the conviction of His *lips* … but as I stood there, listening … something in me began *stir*ring … *awaken*ing … *wonder*ing: Could *this* man … this dusty, thirsty … strange, lonely … wild-eyed, airy-idea-ed *Jewish* man … actually *be* the One we've been waiting for, all this time?! [|] He might have something to *promise* me, I thought … and so, I kept on *listening*.

Or, at least I *wanted* to … but then His bumbling brood of *buddies* crashed in. Not only did they ruin the *moment* … but there was also *no way* I could stay there with not just *one* … but now, *thirteen* … strange Jewish men! And so, I left. But I fully *intended* to *come back:* You don't think it was an *accident* that I left my water jar at the well, do you?! No! I thought I'd need an excuse to *return* … and *receive* more from Him … *learn* more from Him … be *assured* more by Him. He'd begun to make an *impression* on me: I could *feel* the desolate dryness I'd carried inside me for so, so long … begin to *soften,* to *stretch*. And I thought I needed *more—much* more—*so* much more—of Him: to *quench* … to *soak* … to *flood* it.

But then … when I got back here to the city and started *telling* everyone about Him … the words just *flowed* … the [S]pirit[7] *gushed* … the love poured *out,* in great big, crashing, washing *waves*. Somehow

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[4] "The Samaritans dismissed the holiness of Jerusalem; scorned the authority of the scriptures written since the time of Moses; insisted that they alone had preserved the untarnished law of God. No wonder, then, they should have appeared to the Jews a race as mongrel as they were perverse … ." Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (2019), p 74.

[5] I am, rather intentionally, glossing over the woman's marital / sexual history that Jesus brings up. It's 'easy' (for some, at least) to slip into a snide, knowing critique of this woman's supposed immorality or wantonness. But as several commentators have pointed out, the genesis of this history isn't in any way clear, in the text; perhaps she has been widowed … cast out by cruel or unfeeling husbands, etc. Jesus may not be taking her to task for her transgressions … so much as showing He knows the depths of heart and, moreover, what may be troubling her, spiritually.

[6] The Jewish tradition valorized Mt Zion in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God, while the Samaritan tradition looked to Mt Gerizim, much farther north. Both groups felt 'their' mountain was where Abraham had proven willing to sacrifice his son Isaac.

[7] In John's gospel, the HOLY SPIRIT is a gift of Christ promises to the apostles much later in the narrative (14:16-17). But a (looser) notion of the spirit-of-God (in Hebrew: RUACH, which also means WIND or BREATH) … the *breath*-of-God … appears from time-to-time in the Old Testament (think of Ezekiel and the valley of the dry bones, for example).

… deep down … He'd already *made* a *connection* with me … *stirred* something *inside* me: He'd turned me *around;* turned me *toward* Him; turned me—at last!—*right*-side-*up* and *out*side-*out*. It was like everything that'd ever been *false* or *hollow* or *put-on* in me … ever been *restless* or *grasping* or *thirsty* in me … ever been *wrong—or "WRONG"*—with me … He'd *touched* … He'd *cleansed* … He'd *renewed.* And *now* … what flowed out of me … when I *shared* Him with *others* … was pure, cool, refreshing, living, moving water … for *their* souls, too! I don't know exactly how it *came* to me … but the few precious drops of time I spent with Him … *listen*ing, *learn*ing, *hop*ing … were *more* than enough for me to water the lives of *every single person* I encountered … and *still* have *plenty* left over for *me* to drink—indeed, to *swim* in!—*as well*. Not in any heavy stone *jar,* balanced atop my head … but deep, deep in the flowing, abundant well of my *soul*.

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What are the doubts that hold *us back?* What are the supposed limits that undermine *our assurance* … the NOT-ENOUGHs that still *our tongues* and stifle *our sharing?* ¶Do we think we're somehow *incomplete:* that we need to *receive* more *from* Jesus? ¶Do we think we're somehow *ignorant* or *uninformed:* that we need to *learn* more *about* Jesus? ¶Do we think we're somehow not *faithful* enough … not *committed* enough … not *accepting* enough: that we need to more firmly *believe* the *promise* of Jesus? I suppose these things could be true of *any* one of us … of *every* one of us; indeed, they were probably true of St Peter and St Francis *and* Mother Theresa!

But the *greater* truth … the more *powerful* truth … the more *life-giv*ing, *world-chang*ing, *grace-shar*ing truth … is that the water of Jesus' well already *flows through us like a river:*

- The water of our Baptisms … *floats* us to *new life,* in Him
- The water He washes the Apostles' feet with … *anoints* us as His *disciples*
- The water from His piercèd side … *bathes* us in His *forgiveness*
- The water of this Table *dissolves* us … into *Him;* into *one another;* and into *every creature* in this *world* … in His *love*

His water is *in* us … His water flows *through* us … His water *streams* and *abounds, floods* and *overspills* us. And all we need to do … to *connect* with it … to *share* it … to *water* the world with it, in His Name … is … *open our mouths:* share *whatever* we *know* or *think* or even *question* of Him … and then *watch* … as *He* draws water from *our* well … and uses *us* … to slake the *deep* thirst of a world that is so very, very *thirsty*.

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