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*Thirsty? Become a Well! (John 4:5-26)*  
*3/12/2016 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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Ever learned another language? It can be tough. You don't always understand the way things work in the other language. It takes a while to understand how people do things in that different language and in the culture that goes along with it.

I took a Spanish class in college and one of our assignments was to look up a joke in Spanish and share it with the class. I found one. Seemed like a funny joke. It had a couple words in there that I didn't understand. One word in particular, I looked up online and found that it was an expression of surprise. So, ready to teach my classmates, I told my joke in class and explained the new word I learned. When I said it, however, I saw my teacher's jaw drop. He later explained to me that my "expression of surprise" was actually the equivalent of the F word.

Today, in our gospel lesson from John, chapter 4, we read about a conversation Jesus had with a woman. And throughout that conversation, we see that Jesus has no concern for how we humans do things. But Jesus' willingness to cross the line turned one thirsty woman into a well of Living Water.

The story starts with a Samaritan woman with a simple dryness in her mouth, an every-day desire in her stomach for a drink. She was thirsty for a little water, just like anyone, just like any other day.

It was about noon and the woman picked up her jar to get some water from the well outside of town. God doesn't tell us why she came in the heat of the day and he doesn't tell us why she seems to have come by herself rather than going with the other women. Perhaps it just fit her schedule better that day. Maybe she found the heat easier to take than the looks from the other women of town who knew about her broken past.

This day, she found a man, a Jewish man, sitting by the well. About 2000 years ago, prejudice was just as alive and well as it is today. The Samaritans had only part of God's word, what we know as the first five books of the Old Testament. The faithful Jews, on the other hand, had all of it, what we know as all of the Old Testament. Furthermore, the Jews had been faithful to God's command to stay as a separate nation, but the Samaritans had intermingled and intermarried with all kinds of other people so that they were hardly Jews at all.

Because of this, the Jews treated Samaritans as if they were unclean, dirty. In fact, faithful Jewish people ran the risk of being excluded from activity at the temple if they shared a dish with a Samaritan, and especially a Samaritan woman! Sexism was pretty rampant at this time too.

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So you can imagine this woman's surprise when this lone Jewish man at the well, crosses the line by asking her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink! She voiced her shock, but the man doesn't seem interested in talking about racism or in breeching social conventions.

Instead, he tells her that he has "living water," water that will never let you thirst ever again. The woman's been around the block a few times. She knows when something is too good to be true. She sees he doesn't even have a bucket to carry this "living water." So, a little hopeful, a little just to call his bluff, the woman asks for some of this water.

Suddenly this Jewish man crosses the line a second time. He says something she didn't expect, "Go, call your husband." This was a touchy subject for her. Her mind flashed back over broken relationship after broken relationship. She remembered her current less-than-ideal relationship. But this Jewish man seemed to already know the whole story. Suddenly, she realized he was not just any man. He was a prophet. He knew things that there was no way he could. This man, clearly a prophet from God, spoke to this woman from a broken and messy, a sinful and painful past.

Seizing the opportunity to talk with someone who clearly knew things, she asked about one of the big religious questions on her mind, "The Jews say we have to worship at the Temple, but our ancestors worshiped on this mountain. Who's right?"

But the man's answer again crosses a line. He said the place doesn't matter, what matters is that people worship the true God in spirit and in truth. He just skirted around decades of religious debate with this talk of spirit and truth!

That didn't make a whole lot of sense to the woman, but she figured God's promised Messiah was coming and he would teach them everything.

And then the man crossed still another line. He said, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." This Samaritan woman found herself talking with a Jewish man. This woman from a broken past found herself speaking with a prophet of God. This uneducated follower of only part of God's Word found herself talking with one who knew the Spirit and the truth. This sinful woman found herself speaking with the Messiah, the Son of God himself!

Just imagine! Her, of all people, meeting Jesus! She was no theologically trained pastor or professor! She wasn't even a respected woman at her local congregation! She knew very little of theology. She wasn't from the right group of people. She didn't live the right kind of life. But she met her Messiah that day. And ever after her thirst has been quenched by the Living Water!

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Dear friends, we have the Living Water offered freely to us today too. Drink deeply from that living water, quench your thirst, and become a well yourself!

We live in just as thirsty a world as that Samaritan woman did. We live in a world full of racism and prejudice. We live in a world where so many people's love has grown cold. We live in a world of broken relationships and lives. We live in a world divided by external religious debates and controversies. We live in a world that desperately needs Jesus, whether it's you and me here, or people outside our church doors.

We've got a certain way of doing things in this world. We don't associate with people who are different from us, people of different cultures, different beliefs, different ways of doing things. Jesus doesn't care about our way of doing things. That's why we saw him cross all those lines so he could bring the Living Water to a soul in need.

For all our efforts at fighting prejudice, we really haven't come all that far have we? How do you treat people who have different beliefs than you? How do you look at people who aren't WELS? Even here at church, do you reach out to show love to your brothers and sisters here, or do you just ignore everyone you don't already know?

Prejudice is just another of Satan's lies. It makes us take one look at people, see one feature of their looks, one thing they've done, one statement they've made, and then assume that we know everything about them.

But honestly, what business do we have looking down on others, whoever they may be? We just admitted in our confession when our service started that we are *altogether sinful from birth!* We all just admitted that *we have sinned against God, that we do not deserve to be called his child!* Whatever lie Satan tells us to make us look down on other people, how much more unclean can we possibly be than sinful in God's sight?

Does God really care if I am a member at the right church if I refuse to worship the God of love by loving my neighbor? Does God really care that I have the right political beliefs if I have no interest in living my life under *his* rule and according to *his* ways? Does God really care if my life looks nice and clean on the outside if I refuse to turn my heart over to him every moment? God has every reason to look down his nose at us. God has every reason to leave us in our dry, thirsty world with nothing to look forward to.

But he doesn't. He crosses the lines of what is socially acceptable. He reaches out to us no matter how broken our hearts and lives are. He pours that living water on us no matter how dry and cracked our hearts may be.

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Jesus, the Living Water, quenches our thirsty hearts. He teaches us the true way. He teaches us *his* way. He causes his Living Water to become in us a spring welling up to eternal life. Dirty as our sins have been, Jesus has washed them away. Dry as our lives have been, Jesus makes us overflow with the Living Water.

So cast off the dry ways of this world! Do not hold to Satan's lies that tell you that you are somehow better than people who are different than you! Love the unworthy, just as Christ loves us even though we are sinful from birth. Reach out to those with broken lives, just as Christ reaches out to us even though we have sinned against God. Share the Living Water with those who are undeserving, just as Christ has granted you that same water even though you do not deserve to be called God's child.

You have been granted the Living Water, now give it freely. Jesus crossed social barriers to make you his own, now cross those same barriers to make others God's own. Satan tries to get you to think that being clean is just a matter of having the right doctrines in your head, or looking the right way, or living the right kind of life, but you have been freed from these. God shows us that being clean in his sight only comes by trusting in Jesus.

Come to the Living Water. Quench your thirst, and be a well in this dry, thirsting world. Amen.