

Sermon – March 12, 2023
“Fill My Cup, Lord”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: John 4:5-42

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come and visit, filling open hearts and anointing the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that continues our transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen

Good morning! Let me share a few opportunities for prayer as I begin this morning. Based on the straw poll vote held last Sunday after the service, Afton will continue to move forward in the disaffiliation process. Fairfield's Called Church Conference to vote on disaffiliation will be held Monday, March 27th at 5:30 pm. All professing members present may vote. Dr. Bates, our district superintendent, will be here to conduct the conference. He will also conduct a Called Church Conference at Afton UMC at 6:30 for Afton to vote on disaffiliation from the UMC. Please keep both congregations in your prayers as they meet to consider this matter. If you have questions, please contact me and I will work to get you answers. On Wednesday, Fairfield's is planning to host the children and parents from the Good News Club. Pray that families will come, and that we will be able to share a time of table fellowship with them and begin to make connections with these families. At 4:00 pm this afternoon, we will again gather for prayer for awakening at Fairfield's. Please come and spend time in prayer with people who are coming from other churches.

Let me give special thanks to our reader this morning for reading the long text about the Samaritan woman. Let me provide some background for the reading. Jesus is near a Samaritan city called Sychar. Sychar and this area of Samaria do show up in our Bibles in other places. This is the area where Levi and Simeon avenged their sister Dinah as Jacob and his sons settled in the land. Mount Gerizim is where Joshua charged Israel to continue to follow God as they lived in the Promised Land. The northern tribes of Israel were taken out of the area by the Assyrians and into exile. The Assyrians also resettled Gentiles in the area to work the land. Not long after the resettling, lions began to kill those new settlers and the Assyrians sent priests from Israel to teach the Law to the people so that they might know how to live in the land. Those who lived in Samaria only used the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. They also held that it was on this mountain that Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac and that the temple on the mountain was the correct place to worship God.

Jesus seems to have taken this detour through Samaria to avoid additional contact with the Pharisees who are now seeking to persecute him. Pharisees would be unlikely to follow Jesus on this shortcut as they despised the Samaritans and would walk additional days to avoid the area. However, Jesus seems to have come here for another reason. He has a divine appointment with an unnamed woman in the town of Sychar. Remember, the story of the Samaritan woman is a twin to the story of Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus came to Jesus as one who thought himself righteous under the Law, the Torah, through his strict keeping of all of the laws and ordinances the Jews had developed to help them keep the Law. The Samaritan woman comes to Jesus from a very different place. Jesus is tired from the journey and has sat down by the well to rest or to wait for the arrival of the woman. He has sent all of the disciples to town to purchase food and waits alone. At noon, when the sun is high in the sky and most people are seeking a shady place to avoid the sun's strong rays, the woman comes to the well carrying her water jar. It is the wrong time of day for this task, a task that is normally done in the cool of the morning or evening. She comes to the well for water to quench her thirst and finds a Jewish man there alone. She most likely has seen Jesus but has identified him as a Jew and, as such, does not expect any interaction with him, as the Jews considered Samaritan women unclean.¹ She continues on to the well to draw water.

Jesus breaks the silence and asks her to give him a drink. Jesus, a lone Jewish man, a teacher, a holy man, breaks the norms of Jewish society and asks the Samaritan woman for a

drink. According to those norms, Jesus should not be willing even to touch something she has touched or accept a drink from her hand. Yet Jesus asks for a drink of water, breaking the norms for acceptable behavior in Israel. Jesus sets aside the norms of the Jewish society and interacts with women and Samaritans to share something new, to set an example for all of his followers about who will be included in his ministry.

The woman responds to Jesus' request not like Rebekah did when Abraham's slave asked for water at another well and she watered his camel and his companions' camels as well, but the woman does engage Jesus in conversation. Her reply to Jesus, asking why he, a Jew, would ask of her, a Samaritan, a drink and break the norms, may be her attempt to keep this unknown Jewish man from breaking the Jewish laws. Her response carries the possibility of protecting Jesus from uncleanness. She may also be seeking to be left alone to complete her task of getting water in order to take her burden back to the city before the city awakes from its noontime rest. In the Nicodemus story, Nicodemus comes to Jesus. In this story, the Samaritan woman comes to the well, where Jesus is waiting. In the Nicodemus story, Nicodemus begins the exchange with Jesus. Here, Jesus asks the first question, a simple request for a drink of water.

Jesus does not allow the conversation to end, but speaks to her of the gift of God and offers the woman living water. For the Hebrews, living water is water that is moving. Living water is water that would be used to cleanse the body. The woman does not inquire about the gift of God but is curious where Jesus might get living water as the well is deep and he has no vessel to lower into the well to access water. She does not know who Jesus is and asks if he is greater than Jacob who gave them the well and who also drank from the well's life giving water and, like herself, was sustained by the gift of water as were his flocks. The Samaritan woman, like Nicodemus, does not understand Jesus' response. Nicodemus could not think of being born again; he only understood the birth of the flesh. The Samaritan woman only knows the water of the well that she and others drink. Jesus has offered living water, something she does not know. She does not know who Jesus is and she does not know what he speaks of, but she stays with Jesus. She stays in the light. She stays to learn what living water might be. She has compared Jesus to Jacob, not realizing that the one who she speaks to her is the heir to the plot of land and the well. Jesus is the rightful heir to the plot of land given to Joseph and has come and is asking the woman for water and offering her living water if she will ask for it. Jesus teaches the woman that to drink from this well which Jacob gave them will only require all to come again tomorrow

to get more water to satisfy their thirst. The water from this well only temporarily satisfies one's thirst. Jesus then tells her that the water he gives will become in the one who receives it a spring of water (moving water, living water) that will gush up to eternal life. Like Nicodemus, the woman has been given teaching about something new that comes from Jesus. For Nicodemus, it was birth from above. For the woman, it is the idea of living water. Nicodemus does not ask Jesus for new birth. The Samaritan woman does not know what Jesus speaks to but has a thirst deep within to end her trips to the well in the heat of the day, and she is willing to take a great risk to quench it.

At this point in their conversation, the Samaritan woman does something incredible. She asks this lone Jewish man for the water he has told her of. She asks for living water. She asks so that she might never be thirsty again and that she might never have to come to this well in the heat of the day again. She has asked Jesus for living water, even if it is for her own purposes. She desires not to have to come to the well in the heat of the day. She desires to be free of the shame that brings her here at this time of day, alone. She has made a request to Jesus to end her desperate situation that brings her thirsty day after day to the well in the heat of the day. She has just asked Jesus for living water, water that forever ends thirst.

Jesus' response must not have been what she expected. She must have thought he would give her a drink of living water in some way. Jesus instead turns to her heart and tells her to go and get her husband. Jesus' request implies that all she needs to do to receive living water is to go and get her husband, bring him back, and then she will be given living water. There is no pause here in John's writing, no indication of her working in her thoughts to find a way to meet Jesus' request or to develop an answer to Jesus that would explain why she can't do what he has asked. Yet, she does not turn away and leave but stays in the light and tells Jesus she has no husband. There is no one she can go to and ask to come to be her husband. There is a reason she comes to the well in the heat of the day alone. And Jesus is about to change that reason. She confesses to Jesus that she has no husband. Jesus, filled with the Spirit, then speaks prophetically to her situation, telling her that she has had five husbands and that the one she has now is not her husband. She has confessed her situation to Jesus, and he speaks prophetically into her life, into the state of her thirsty heart. She is convicted of her situation. She comes before Jesus as a sinner who wants living water but has no hope of bringing a husband back with her so that she might receive living water. All she can do is tell the truth, a truth she thinks will keep her from

receiving living water. She tells Jesus the truth, truth he already knew before he offered the water. Before he asked for a drink, before he came to the well, Jesus knew the truth. Yet, in light of her burdens, Jesus gives her grace and speaks prophetic words of knowledge over her situation, letting her know that her situation is known to him. Jesus is giving her living water as she comes to understand who he is and believe in him. Jesus knows her, knows her past, knows what needs to happen for her to receive living water. She cannot do anything to receive living water; it must be given to her. She realizes this Jewish man is more than a Jewish traveler. She realizes he is a prophet. The Samaritans only used the first five books of the Old Testament. They only knew of one prophet. The woman only knows of the one like Moses who is to come. She stays in the light of Jesus. She does not leave, but she does try to deflect the insight Jesus has into her heart by moving the conversation to the place of worship of God, a common argument between Jews and Samaritans.

There at Jacob's well in the heat of the noon sun with only a woman of Samaria present, Jesus reveals more of God. Through three quick expressions, Jesus reveals more of God to this woman and to us. Jesus changes for the first time in John's Gospel from saying "my Father" to "the Father," opening the door that will include others. Jesus tells the woman that the argument she knows of about worship is wrong, that the Father will be worshiped in spirit and truth, and that the Father seeks true worshipers. And then Jesus tells the woman that God is spirit, God is unseen, and He is not worshiped by falling down before an idol on top of a mountain, but by those who come to worship in spirit and truth. Jesus will become the temple, the true lasting place of worship, Christ in us, the gift of God into which the Holy Spirit leads all who come to Jesus.

The woman remains in the light of Jesus but brings up one last defense. She makes one last attempt to shield her heart and who she is from the source of living water. She tells Jesus what she knows about the coming one whom Moses told of. She tells Jesus that she knows this Messiah is coming and when he comes, he will proclaim all things to the people. She tells Jesus, the Son of God, that one is coming who will share Good News with all people. And Jesus' reply to her statement is that he is "I am." Let our minds connect Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman to God on another mountain telling Moses that He is "I am." Often, by moving Jesus' reply into correct grammar, our translations miss the connection to God. Jesus declares to her he is God, the Messiah who is coming who proclaims all things to all people. He is here, sitting at

the well, giving grace, offering living water and eternal life. And in that moment, Jesus' disciples return with food, the woman leaves and heads to the city, and John tells us she leaves her water jar behind.

The water jar is left at the well and the Samaritan woman goes back to the city. She is not going to get her husband; she does not have one. She is not carrying water back in her jug; she left it at the well. It would only hold water to be used to temporarily remove thirst. She goes without her water jug. She goes without her daily burdens that have long brought her to well in the heat of the day. She came to the well a sinner, but she goes back to the city as one who has been given living water, water that is now gushing up in her and becoming a spring that leads to eternal life. Forgotten are the burdens she has carried to the well. She has gone to tell people that there is a man who looked into her heart and told her everything about herself. She goes to tell them the coming Messiah is at the well waiting to give them the spring of water that gushes up to eternal life. She goes not as one sent by Jesus, but one who in the joy of her transformation wants to share the source of her joy with everyone she knows. She goes to the city to take living water to those she knows are also thirsty. She goes to share her testimony and bring others to the source of living water. She went out to the well in sin but comes back in service to the Messiah. She comes back with courage, filled with living water to share what she has received. An incredible thing then happens in the town of Sychar. Many people believe in Jesus because of the woman's words and many more believe in Jesus when he speaks with them. Belief, in the Gospel of John, is salvation, life eternal.

Notice that John never mentions the water jar being picked up. It is as if it is left behind at the well. It is a burden, a task, left so that one might instead go and share living water with others. We should ask ourselves some questions as we think about that water jug sitting at the well. We should ask ourselves: What jar are we carrying? What thirst is deep within us that we need Jesus to remove from our lives? What tasks are we doing that we need to put down so that we might go to those we know and share the living water that pours out of our hearts because Jesus has given us living water? We have been to the well with Jesus and seen him transform a woman, an unnamed sinner, who came to Jesus thirsty and left him filled with living water. Are we those who have been with Jesus and received living water? Have we left our water jars at the well or do we seek to carry them filled with water that only temporarily stops our thirst? Have we left our vocations, our work, to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ? Are we taking

living water to those in our community? Will we take the risk the Samaritan woman took and ask Jesus for living water? Are we courageous like the Samaritan woman? Are we desperately thirsting for water? If we are carrying an empty water jug, then come to Jesus, put it down, and let him fill us with living water, and then go away to share with others the living water Jesus gives to fill thirsty hearts. If we have water jugs that we are carrying, come to the altar, and let me pray with you today that we may believe in Jesus and be filled with living water. I will be at the altar after the service if any would like prayer.

Let me end with a quote from one of the early fathers of the church, Romanus Melodus, who wrote of the woman at the well, “But when the Merciful One was near the spring, ... Then the woman of Samaria, coming from her native village, Sychar, arrived, and she had her urn on her shoulders; And who would not call blessed the arrival and departure of this woman? For she departed in filth; she entered into the figure of the church as blameless; She departed, and she drew out life like a sponge. She departed bearing water; she became a bearer of God; And who does not bless this woman; or rather who does not revere her, the type of the nations. As she brings exceeding great joy and redemption?”ⁱⁱ

Pray with me: Jesus, we confess we come to you as those seeking to carry the burdens of our life. Lord, fill us with living water that we might leave our empty water jugs, our burdens, with you and go to other thirsty people, taking living water to all we know and meet. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

ⁱ Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4) (p. 205). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ John 1-10: 4A (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture) (p. 165). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition