

"Living Water"

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, nourish us with your living water and bread of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

A young boy was sent to bed by his father. Five minutes later the father hears, "Da-ad..." "What is it, son?" "I'm thirsty, can you please bring me a cup of water?" "No, you had your chance. Lights out and please go to sleep." Five minutes later, "Da-aaad..." "What is it, son?" "I'm thirsty, can I please have a drink of water?" "I told you 'No', and if you ask again, I'll have to spank you. It's time to go to sleep." Five minutes later, "Da-aaaaaad." "What?" "When you come in to spank me, could you please bring me a cup of water?" Have you ever been that thirsty - when all you can think about is water? A simple cup of water.

A young marine corporal named Joey Mora was standing on a platform of an aircraft carrier that was patrolling the Iranian Sea and he fell overboard. His absence was not noticed for 36 hours. Then a search and rescue mission began, but it was aborted after an additional 24 hours. No one could survive in the sea without a life jacket for 60 hours. His parents were notified that he was "missing, and presumed dead."

However, about 72 hours after Joey Mora had fallen from the aircraft carrier, four Pakistani fishermen found him. He was treading water, clinging to a makeshift floatation device made from his trousers. He was delirious when they pulled him into their fishing boat. His tongue was dry and cracked and his throat was parched.

About two years later, Joey spoke on NBC News, and he said it was God who kept him struggling to survive. Joey said that the one thought

that took over his body and pounded in his brain was "Water! Water!" Have you ever been that thirsty - when all you can think about is water? A simple cup of water.

Jesus uses our powerful need for water to describe our powerful need for the Holy Spirit. John's message for us today is very artfully written, recounting a dialogue between Jesus and a Samaritan woman that's filled with irony and metaphor.

The little town where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman is Sychar, near Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans worshipped God, about half way between Jerusalem and Galilee. The only sources of fresh water would have been a community well or a stream. Running water, like in a stream, was used for ritual cleansing and was referred to as "living water." John the Baptist baptized people in the living water of the Jordan River. Generally, any running water was living water rather than the still water contained in a cistern or a well. The Samaritan woman knows about the still water in the well and about the living water in streams, but Jesus is talking about a metaphorical kind of living water that sustains the soul and she doesn't get it. Ironically, she asks the right questions, but for the wrong reasons! She wants Jesus' living water so that she will never be thirsty again and won't have to come to the well anymore! It's a great metaphor: the life-giving gift of water is like God's life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit who is in us like a spring of living water gushing up to eternal life.

The woman is an unnamed Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were outsiders and enemies of the Jewish people, even though they both accepted the Law of Moses, the first five books of the Old Testament. They had a centuries old conflict about where the correct central location of their faith should be. The Jews had a Temple in Jerusalem and the Samaritans had a Temple on the top of Mount Gerizim, near where the Samaritan

woman lived. The Jewish people destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim in 128 BC. Jewish people in Jesus' time would not invite contact with a Samaritan, and a Jewish man would not initiate conversation with an unknown woman, especially a Samaritan woman. Yet, Jesus begs for water from the Samaritan woman who becomes one of the first apostles to spread the good news about Jesus. Jesus' message is for everyone, even Samaritans!

In C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the lion, who represents God, says to Jill, "Are you not thirsty?" "I'm dying of thirst," said Jill. "Then drink," said the lion. "May I - could I - would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill. The lion answered this only by a look and very low growl. As Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. "Will you promise not to - do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill. "I make no such promise," said the lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer the lion. "Do you eat girls?" she said. "I have swallowed up, consumed girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. "I daren't come and drink," said Jill. "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion. "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." The lion said, "There is no other stream."

We all need water. It's a powerful metaphor. And if we drink of the living water that Jesus promises, we will be devoured, consumed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Disciples return from the city with food, Jesus talks to them about food that's parallel to his previous conversation with the Samaritan woman about living water. And there's similar irony as the Disciples don't understand the metaphor about food either. The Disciples think that Jesus got food from someone else. Jesus is trying to describe the nourishment that we receive from doing the will of God. The food metaphor deepens with his discussion of sowing and reaping that relates to the future work of the Disciples and interestingly, to the work that the Samaritan woman has already begun. The kingdom of God has already begun in Jesus, and in the Samaritan woman, and in all those who are filled with the living water of the Holy Spirit and nourished by doing the will of God.

The Samaritan woman had five husbands and the man that she is currently with is not her husband. The first five are referred to as husbands, so she was married to each one and was either widowed or legally divorced from each one. The man she is with now is not her husband, which is suggestive of her being a sinner, but we don't know, the man could be her brother or a son. In a way we prejudge her without all of the facts. She goes to the well at mid-day though, which might provide a clue. Women would normally go to the well in the cool of the morning to get water for the day. The Samaritan woman is for some reason going at about noon, in the heat of the day, possibly to avoid the other women. So, she may not be a sinner, but for some reason, she may carry a social burden in her relationships with the local women. We don't know. We have a tendency to judge people, even the characters in a story, but it's very significant that Jesus does not judge this woman. Jesus begins by begging her to give him some water and while he's aware of her situation with five previous husbands, there's not a single word of judgement or reprimand in the dialogue. She doesn't fully understand Jesus' metaphorical message to

her, but she takes the initiative to tell her story to the people from whom she is isolated and invites them to come and see Jesus for themselves. She's empowered by the gift of living water – the spirit of Jesus, and she's being nourished by doing the will of God.

We have a great need of the Holy Spirit. And we benefit greatly by the awesome power and persistence of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes quarrymen find a very hard kind of rock. They pick little grooves for iron wedges, and then with great sledge hammers drive these little wedges into the hard rock. Sometimes this fails to split the rock. Then they go at it another way. The iron wedges are replaced with little wooden wedges. These sharp-edged, wooden wedges are put in the grooves tightly and water is kept in the grooves.

It takes longer than the iron wedges and sledge, but after a while the damp wood swells and the rock splits. The water works on the wood, and that in turn works on the stone. It's like the soft, persistent power of the Holy Spirit.

The Samaritan woman and Jesus have a *Who's on First* dialogue, just as the Disciples and Jesus discuss *What's on Second*, but they are all filled with living water and nourished to do the will of God – like us. Thanks be to God. Amen.