

24 February 2008  
Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Gift of God”

Text: John 4:5-26 (Romans 5:1-8)

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

*It was about the sixth hour*, which according to Jewish rendering of time would be high noon, when the sun is at its highest, making it hot and uncomfortable. It is not the time of day you do chores. Like here in the summer, you do those in the early morning or the late afternoon, when it is not too hot, and during the heat of the day you stay inside, in the shade, in the cool.

Unless you are an outcast. Unless you are not welcome with the other women at the well in the morning, and are forced to come in the heat of the day. Like that day at Sychar, Samaria, when Jesus sits by the well of Jacob, and a lone Samaritan woman comes to draw water. She didn't come at that time because she *wanted* to, but because she *had* to. She probably didn't even make eye contact with Jesus, but instead planned to draw her water quickly and quietly as she did every day at this unusual time, and get back home. Away from the whispering voices and disapproving looks of those who considered themselves holier and better than she.

And so no one is more surprised than this woman when Jesus speaks to her. A woman, a Samaritan, and an outcast, who had been chewed up and spit out, used and abused by five husbands, who had learned life the hard way and had to work for everything she had. *Why, why you would be talking to me, O Jewish man?* Her suspicion was aroused and her defenses went up. This is why she came at noon, to avoid these confrontations. She didn't need another bruise to her soul, another kick to her spirit, another slice into her wounded heart. So why are you asking me for a drink? What's the punchline? When's the other shoe going to drop . . . on me?

So imagine her surprise when Jesus speaks kindly to her. As He speaks not of using her and taking from her, but of serving her and giving to her. The gift of God. Living water. It sounds too good; too good to be true. She won't let herself believe

it. Who does He think He is? Can He dig a well with His own two hands? *Is He greater than our father Jacob?*

I think that would be like asking one of today's presidential hopefuls if they thought they were greater than Washington, the father of our country. It is hard to imagine an affirmative response. . . . And yet before her is sitting the one greater than Jacob. And what makes Him so great is that He is there, *for her*.

But to understand that we need to back up a bit and remember "father Jacob." Jacob was the one named "heel" for he came out of the womb grasping his twin brother's heel - and he lived up (or maybe we should say *down!*) to his name. He took advantage of his brother's hunger and stole his birthright. Then later he deceptively stole his blessing. And it was because he was running for his life away from his brother that he found himself next to a well, in the land of his mother's people, and laid eyes on the woman who would be his bride. Beautiful Rachel. So smitten is he that he agrees to work for her father seven years in exchange for her hand in marriage. After those years, he gets some of his own deceptive medicine when his father-in-law gives him the other, homely sister, Leah instead, and he is forced to work another seven years for his Rachel. And Jacob then becomes the father of the twelve sons whose names would grace the twelve tribes of Israel.

And so yes, Ms. Samaritan! One greater than Jacob is here! For here before you is our Jacob has come not to take, but to give back to us, the blessing and birthright deceptively taken from us by satan. He has come not to give us mere earthly blessings that last only for a time, but spiritual blessings that last for eternity. And for His bride He worked not only seven or fourteen years - He worked to death; to the death of the cross to win her. And this work for what bride? A lovely Rachel? No, but for sinners like you and me and Ms. Samaritan, so uglified by sin that we make homely Leah look like a trophy bride!\* And yet so much did our Jacob love us, that no price was too high a price to pay. And so our Jacob digs not a well, but his own grave. Digging all the way to hell and back again, to rescue us not from physical thirst, but spiritual thirst. To give us the living water that we drink and never thirst again.

Perhaps all this is what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote: "*For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person [or for a beautiful bride!] one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

Yes, still sinners. That's us, isn't it? For while Jesus is greater than Jacob, the apple hasn't fallen far from the Jacob tree for us gathered here today. For us who often act like heels towards others. For us who take advantage of others to get what we want, and think little of our gain at their loss. For us who like Ms. Samaritan may be used and abused, chewed up and spit out by a sinful world, but who (we must admit) do our own share of chewing up and spitting out, using and abusing as well. For us who have committed spiritual adultery far more times than we care to admit. And how much else? How uglified by sin are we, both inside and out? By the sin we know and the sin we don't? By the sin of our shame and the sin of our pride?

And yet here today, for us, for us uglified sinners, our Jacob sits by the well of this font, and bids us to His living water. This font that He dug with his own death and resurrection, and filled with the water that flowed from His side. That we be washed and cleansed and drink deeply of His forgiveness, instead of drinking the poison of sin satan keeps sending our way. And our Jacob is here, bidding us come and dine at His table, to eat and drink His body and blood, our bridegroom giving us His very life. Yes, our Jacob is here, for you and me. Who says to us: I know your past. I know who you are. I know your secrets and your innermost thoughts. I know your weaknesses and your failures. I know your sin. That's why I'm here. The greatest become the least, that all you who are lower than the least, might become mine. My bride. My Church. And if you thought Ms. Samaritan heard some pretty wonderful words that day . . . *what about those!*

Turns out Jesus never did get His drink that day. Did you notice that? But He wasn't really asking for a drink of water. He thirsted for much more - for you and me. And so *He* asks to *teach us to ask*. For 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 . . .*"

Yes, *if we knew the gift of God . . .* nothing else would matter, would it? For when you have Him who is everything, what else do you need? What else do you need that He will not provide? And what are we hanging onto in this world and life instead of Him? What dung that we think is treasure, what failure that we have christened success, what skeletons in our closets that we're trying to keep? Repent and let go, and cling to Him who clings to you. This Lenten season, learn again the gift of God, and cling to Him who gives forgiveness and life.

For it was no coincidence that Jesus was there at Jacob's well that day in Sychar,

Samaria, and no coincidence that He is here. For He is searching for His bride. He has come for you. So come, let us ask for – *and receive!* – His living water. The gift of God *from* the gift of God.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

\* *This sentence, and some of the other thoughts and themes contained in this sermon from Christ Crucified, Lutheran Sermons by Rev. Chad L. Bird, p. 137-138.*