

27 March 2011  
Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus Satisfies the Thirsting Soul”  
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.

Life doesn't often turn out as you had hoped or planned. Childhood dreams give way to adult realities. Most of us don't become baseball stars or princesses. Even those who have those lives find out they aren't quite what they expected. And when that happens, the joy of life can become instead resignation, and hopes and dreams devolve into just trying to making the best of it.

And so it was for that lonely Samaritan woman we meet today in the Holy Gospel. What hopes and dreams did she have growing up? But life had been cruel to her. She had the scars of five husbands, and the man she now had - did she not trust him, or did he not consider her “marriage material?” She had the hurt of being an outcast - having to go to the well alone and at noon, after the other women had drawn and were resting in the shade in the heat of the day. She was making the best of it, but her life was a burden of sadness and pain.

*What did she think of Jesus?* Well, clearly, her defenses were up! But maybe there was something else going on here . . . A Jew in Samaria was quite an unusual thing. Pious Jews would go out of their way to walk around Samaria, rather than through it. Samaritans were unclean and to be avoided. But this Jew was there . . . And then Jesus speaks to her and even asks her for a drink. *This was way off the charts!* So perhaps she began to wonder who this man was, and why he was so desperate. Maybe here is someone who has been hurt like her; who is an outcast like her; who is *thirsty* like her - and not just for water from a well.

And so she asks, cautiously: *Why are you here? How can you ask?*

How surprised she must have been by His answer! He spoke not as someone in need, but as someone who was there to give, *and who was willing to give to 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, and he would have given you living water.”* A gift sounded good to her weary, hurt soul, but when you've been disappointed before, you don't quickly get your hopes up. *Sir, you have nothing to draw with. You're out here with even less than me! How can you . . . Where will you . . . ?*

Jesus doesn't explain. He knows that she is really the thirsty one, and so simply repeats His offer. The great physician of the soul is at work, leading her to the truth. ***"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."***

And with that, she leaps. ***"Sir, give me this water . . ."*** Maybe this time it will turn out differently.

***"Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." "*** Or maybe not. ***"I have no husband"*** she says. A half truth. To hide the hurt? The inevitable rejection? But Jesus knows the truth of the past and the pain of the present. Yes, *five husbands . . . and the one now . . .* The truth had been spoken. Her life exposed. Her shame laid bare. This was usually when the hurt was made worse with mocking and shunning.

But Jesus did neither. He spoke the truth and awaited her response. It seems at first as if her response is to change the subject. *OK, you're a prophet. So let's talk religion. Where are we supposed to worship?* But there is more to her question than meets the eye. She wasn't just looking for the answer to the latest religious controversy of her day. **She was looking for forgiveness.** For her sin had been exposed, but how could it be dealt with? *Where, Mr. Prophet, is God? Where is forgiveness? Where is the mercy seat? Where can I go? Where is the life and the love and the cleansing I so desperately need?*

And Jesus' answer? *Neither place!* Salvation is from the Jews, yes, but ***the hour is coming, and is now here***, when the Temple - the place of forgiveness - will be not a building, but a person; and worship - receiving the gifts of God - will be not just in a certain place, but in spirit and in truth. For as Jesus said when He started off this conversation with Ms. Samaritan: ***"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, and he would have given you living water."*** A drink for her parched and thirsty soul. For the gift of God, His place of mercy, the giver of the Spirit, forgiveness, and life, was sitting right before her! She didn't have to go to the Temple - the Temple (and its forgiveness) had come to her! For, Jesus concludes, ***"Yes, I AM."*** He is the Christ, the Messiah, bearer of the divine name and the divine life. And He had come for her. That she might drink deeply of His love, forgiveness, and Spirit.

*And He has come for you.* For this woman's story is our story. We need the gift of God - nothing else really matters. Nothing else can satisfy our parched and thirsty souls. Yet how often do we look to the people and things of this world and life to satisfy our thirst for love, our thirst for life, our thirst for significance? How often do

we drink the poison of sin the satanic bartender slides our way? How often do we thirst for the world's acceptance and approval, instead of our Lord's? How often do we draw from the world's agenda set our agenda? Yet these things do not satisfy and give us what we need.

We need the gift of God. And so for us, too, the one greater than Jacob has come, to give us this gift of God, this gift that we so need - this gift of Himself. For while the patriarch Jacob worked 14 years for his bride, Rachel, *our Jacob* did much more than that - He laid down His life for you and me. He dug not a well with His hands, but a grave. And not because we're beautiful and faithful, like Rachel; but rather, as St. Paul told us today: ***God show[ed] his love for us in that while we were still [ugly] sinners, Christ died for us.*** He died for us and all the other shamed and sinful Ms. Samaritans out there, that we be washed and cleansed in His blood. To beautify us and make us His bride in the forgiveness of our sins. And the well that He sits by for you today is this font, for there is His living and Spirit-filled water for your parched and thirsting soul.

For there, in those waters, is the drink that *you* need - not to satisfy your physical thirst, but your spiritual thirst. That your sins of past and present, your sins of body and soul, your sins of commission and omission, your sins that have hurt others or that so hurt you, be forgiven. Now, your heavenly Bridegroom looks at you and sees them not. For they are gone, washed away in the flood of His forgiveness. Now He looks at you and sees only His beloved, pure and clean and perfect.

*Which doesn't seem possible, does it? For we remember the sins - the sins we did and regret, and the shame . . . and if we can't forget them, how can God? There must be something more to it; something we have to do. But no. Because God does not just *forget* our sin and shame - He took it away, He made it His own, and He died for it. For you. And so it is not your sin and shame any more - it is His. He took it, and set you free. Free to be His holy, beautiful, Bride.*

Like Ms. Samaritan. How excited was she? Well, in the verses right after what we heard today, she is like a young woman that runs home to show off her new engagement ring! She runs back to her village to gush about her Saviour! Where was her shame? Where was her sin? Where was her separation and loneliness? *It was gone.* She was loved, and she now loved. Not like before, but new. For this living water was now a *spring* of water, flowing from her.

And so is it for you, beloved of the Lord. You are loved, and you now love. The chains of sin and regret and shame that hold you back have been broken by His love and forgiveness and set you free, that His living water be now a spring of water, flowing from you. Flowing from you as a friend and neighbor, as a co-worker, as a father or mother, as a husband or wife. To any and all around you

whose souls are parched and thirsting - you have the living water they need: the Word and Spirit of truth. Which *doesn't* mean that you go up to them with your Bible and thump them about the head and shoulders! It means to love and forgive them when no one else will. It means to be there for them when no one else will. It means, perhaps, to expose the sin, but then tell them of the forgiveness of Christ, who wants them as His Bride. Not because you *have to* - but because you have a ring on your finger, and streams of living water flowing from you.

And best of all, when the sun comes out and life gets rough, when the demons return and try to drag all those skeletons out of your closet, when you find yourself hungry and thirsty and tired once again, when the sin in us and around us seem to be getting the upper hand again - our Lord didn't just come *once* and sit on a well in Samaria, He comes today and sits upon this altar, that you may be refreshed. And once again He embraces you with His forgiveness, pledges you His love, and feeds you with His own Body and Blood, to give you life and tell you again that His love has not changed. You are still His beloved Bride.

And to worship in spirit and in truth is to receive these gifts. For to worship in spirit and in truth *doesn't* mean high-charged, emotional worship that makes you feel good, in contrast to the old, crusty Temple and liturgy and sacrifices and stuff. No - that *alone* is just as empty and thirst-causing as the other things we chase that cannot really satisfy. No, to worship in spirit and in truth means this: to receive your Saviour and His gifts; to drink deeply of the living water of His Spirit and forgiveness; to find in Him your love and life. For only He can satisfy your thirsty soul, which is the very thing He has come to do.

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.