

Have you had enough to drink?

A Sermon for March 19, 2017

John 4:5-42

[Lansdowne UMC](#)

It was a hot Dominican summer day at Barrio de la Playa del Muerto (“The neighborhood of the beach of the dead”). Our missions group was running a packed medical clinic and a ruthless game of soccer, along with some parachute games, and jump rope.

When you’re running around in the summer sun with Dominican kids, it takes some extra effort to stay hydrated. And that’s not only because it’s hot and you sweat, but it’s because you often don’t *feel* thirsty. So trying to combat all of that, various members of the team would frequently get on each other and ask “have you had enough drink?” Inevitably the person being asked would think for a second, and then put on a sheepish face and admit, “no, I haven’t had enough to drink,” and that would cause them to sneak as big of a drink as they could from their water bottle. I say that they had to sneak it, because the water that we were going to give to the children hadn’t arrived yet, and the last thing you want is a thirsty kid coming up to you and asking “agua, por favor?” or “water please?” Because you know that you don’t have enough water in your little bottle for everyone.

About 30 minutes later, one of our mission partners showed up with 150 bags of water for the kids-- that’s how water comes when you want to get it on the cheap. Another friend who’s a teacher organized the kids in a line and as they each came to the front, they politely extended their hand in order to receive their 3 cent bag of water.

We had about fifty bags left over, and they were were taken over to the medical clinic. Our guests in the clinic greeted the sight of the water

with gladness. But it felt like as soon as we started to give the water out, we were running low. We made the decision to only give bags to the children.

Once the supply was exhausted, some of the team members took refuge from the sun in the shade of the medical clinic, and they took in the scene: the children dumped the water down their parched throats as if they had never had water before. And in fact, this was the only *clean* water that most of those kids would have that day. And I sat corner of the room, holding my face in my hands, hoping that no one would see the convulsive sobs erupting uncontrollably at the sight. I think that day I saw Jesus. He didn't appear to me as a Jewish Rabbi, but as a 5 year-old Dominican boy, asking "agua, por favor."

That day I gained a passion for people who are thirsty, and only have dirty, parasite-filled water to quench their thirst. Only recently have I realized that that story is true in the spiritual realm as well. There are so many people in the world who are spiritually thirsty, and they only have dirty, parasite-filled water to quench their spiritual thirst. It's not that people don't get along. They do. But the dirty water does its work-- it claims to be able to give life, but it ends up being a parasite and leeching out whatever life you have. And so imagine if you found a source of water so good, so pure, so abundant, so accessible, so... free. And you tasted and saw with your own senses that it was good. You'd want to share it-- not simply because it was your preferred water source, although it would be. You'd want to share it was desperately needed.

This story that we read from John chapter 4, is a story about tired and thirsty people finding that source of water. And just as Jesus asking me for water in the Dominican Republic stirred up in me a desire to see the physical thirst of others quenched, Jesus asking this woman at the well for water ends up leading to her being stirred up to have the

spiritual thirst of others quenched.

At first glance, the story seems like the one we looked at last week with Nicodemus, and there certainly are similarities. On second glance, though, everything about this story is different from the Nicodemus story. There it's a man, here it's a woman-- and at the time no Jew would be found alone with a woman. There we know his name, here her name is forgotten to history, so we just call her "the woman at the well." There he comes under cover of night, here she comes in a heat of the day. There we have a Jew. Here we have a Samaritan. And as the story says, Jews and Samaritans will have nothing to do with each other, and they certainly wouldn't share water vessels. There it is a respected public figure, here it is a woman who has apparently been marginalized by her society. Why else would she be fetching the water in the heat of the day, when it seems that she would have been alone, had Jesus not been there? Oh and one more thing: there, Nicodemus gets schooled by Jesus quickly, and even gets a little bit berated. Here, the woman holds her own in what I think is the longest recorded theological debate with Jesus-- so long that I felt like it would really just be too much to read the whole thing.

Jesus asks the woman for a drink, and the woman immediately realizes how Jesus is breaking all types of customs and proprieties to ask that question. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

Since they share this need for water-- this *thirst*-- in common, Jesus sees the opportunity to awaken in her an awareness of her own *spiritual* thirst. Jesus responds, "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."

This is the point where being at least a second-time reader of the

Gospel of John is really helpful. In chapter 7, these images are spelled out for us a little more. There Jesus says, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ” The narrator then adds, “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive.”

This gift of God, this living water, is the Holy Spirit-- the person of God’s own love and life, who comes into the heart of whoever trusts in Jesus. The Holy Spirit quenches spiritual thirst. In communion we pray, “[God] pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here.” Paul says in Romans 5 that because of the Holy Spirit, we know that the hope that we have is no mere fantasy, because through the Spirit, God’s love has flooded our hearts. For Paul, the Holy Spirit is no afterthought, but the Spirit always gets tied up with how we talk about God and Jesus.

After the woman comments about Jesus’ lack of bucket and the deepness of the well, Jesus explains that the water that he gives is like a spring of water within that bubbles up, bringing eternal life. The knowable presence of the Holy Spirit gives us God’s own love and the Holy Spirit is the means by which that life from heaven, that life that never ends, comes into us.

It’s not particularly clear that the woman got any of that-- how could she? And so Jesus pivots to a topic that is more present and personal to her. “Call your husband and come back.” Now, we aren’t given any information about the specifics of the woman’s situation. All we learn is that she has had five husbands and that she doesn’t have a husband now because the man she is with is not her husband. It’s been popular to assume that she was some shady woman with an incredible history of adultery. She may just as well have been a victim of unfaithful husbands, or husbands that kept on dying, and now the man she’s with

won't marry her. All that seems to be clear is that she's carrying some shame. Jesus makes it clear that he knows her, he knows her story.

Pastor Tim Keller, in a book his book on marriage, manages to describe the dynamic that is going on here. He says that "To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us."

And so this is what Jesus has to tell the woman: I know everything about you. I know you fully. And God loves you fully. You can see that I know you fully, but you can't believe that I love you fully. That's why God wants to give you the Holy Spirit, so that you can know that you are not only fully known, but also fully, completely loved.

I had a real epiphany about prayer in the past year or so. Jesus knows everything I've ever done. Me telling Jesus doesn't change that, whether it's my sin or my temptations-- my struggles or my delights. Jesus knows all of it, and Jesus loves me completely. One response to that is to say, "well, I guess I don't need to tell Jesus." That's true if your goal is for Jesus to know-- he already knows. But if your goal is relationship, if your goal is experience the reality that you are fully known and fully loved, then pour your heart out to Jesus. Whatever is in there. Good. Bad. Ugly. He knows it all. The only thing it can do is bring you closer to him.

It's just like how in the Dominican Republic, we need to ask each other, "have you had enough to drink?" We often don't realize how spiritually thirsty we are until we think about it.

Some of us are thirsty and we know it. We know that we've fallen away from God and need to be reconciled. We know that are like that

rock in the desert. We need a good “whack” from Moses’ staff to break the hardness. Then the living water can flow. That realization is good. That’s something God can work with.

But I want to consider specifically those of us who wouldn’t particularly put ourselves in the category of “sinners in need of repentance and salvation.” Let me help you think through what spiritual thirst might look like in your life. You’ve come to church with some frequency. You believe in Jesus-- it’s hard sometimes, but you try to believe. You’d never admit this in church, but you often wonder “is this all there is? Are we just fooling ourselves here?”

That, my brothers and sisters, is spiritual thirst. It’s a holy discontent that says “there has to be more.” That’s not something to beat yourself up about. That’s actually God’s grace at work in your life. That’s something to talk to Jesus about. Jesus already knows. Because if you knew the gift of God, and who it was that you were talking to, you’d ask him, and he’d give you living water.

I love how this story with the woman progresses. Once the disciples return, just as the disciples had left their nets and go to fish for people, this woman leaves her water jar and goes to quench the spiritual thirst of others.

What is it that sends the woman back to the city? I think it’s that she’s met Jesus, she told her everything she’d ever done, and now she has a story that she can’t keep to herself. You know, for a good chunk of my life, I didn’t really think I had a story worth sharing. I wouldn’t have understood this woman at all. But God’s been working a lot in my life the past few years, and now I feel like I have a story that I can’t keep to myself. I’d love to share it with all of you, but it seems to me that it’s better to do that across a table than across a pulpit. So if you’re interested, ask me, and we’ll find a time to talk.

As I close... Maybe you're thinking to yourself, "I don't have a story worth telling." I just want to offer two reasons that that might be. The first is that you've never really thought about it. But if you went home today, you could come up with a time when things were different in your life. And you could start to write it down, realizing there was a "Before" a "this is what happened" and a "this is where I am now."

"Before I met Jesus, I used to go get my water at a time when I wouldn't risk running into anyone who knew my past. **Then, this is what happened:** I met Jesus and he told me everything I ever did. **And this is where I am now:** I want others to know the one who knows me completely and loves me completely.

The second reason that you might feel that you don't have a story worth telling is that you still need God to write you one. You have that sense of holy discontent, because you don't want to have to outsource your spirituality to other people any more.

And so I ask, have you had enough to drink? I don't about you but I'm thirsty for more of God's Spirit. I want God's love to flood my heart. I want any rock hard shell I have to be broken so that the streams of living water will flow. So that through even me, through even you, others might see our passion, and hear our stories, and come and hear from Jesus themselves. And I want them to come back and say to me "We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world."