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A WELL THAT NEVER RUNS DRY
John 4:5-42; Lent 3A; March 7-8, 2026

[GREETING]

Our son's boss in Virginia has a home with a well. The well has a serious issue: it's drying up, even though it is hundreds of feet deep. He's not getting enough water to supply the house – only half a gallon of water per minute. He could pay to drill a new deeper well, but there are no guarantees that you will have good water when drilling a well – and you pay for every foot drilled no matter what the outcome. An unreliable water supply is a serious problem. We need a constant and reliable supply of water to live.

Today's Gospel focuses on water, natural well water and living water from Jesus. **Jesus said to [the woman by the well], "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 forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."**

The water Jesus promised the woman at the well is the very water we need from Him. We can't get this water from any well we dig or from the city water mains, water that we can drink when thirsty, but will get thirsty again. Clean water, H₂O, is necessary for life and health – our bodies are about 60% water, and getting even a little dehydrated weakens us and can lead to death if not replenished.

Jesus' living water is also necessary, not just for physical life and health but especially for eternal life. The water Jesus has for us is promised to quench our thirst, never run out, and always be available to us. **"Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

We can't get living water from the city water main or from any well we drill. How do we get this water from Jesus?

When the woman heard what Jesus said about **living water that never runs out**, she thought that it was only physical water like she was working to draw from the deep well outside of town. His response to her, even though it does not seem to have anything to do with His discussion of **“a spring of water welling up to eternal life,”** explains the sort of water He meant.

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered Him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The woman felt her thirst and needed physical water from the well to live. She also had a thirst that she either did not realize she had or was unwilling to admit she had.

What did Jesus know about her? She had been married and divorced five times, and the man she was then living with was not her husband. She was a multiple transgressor of the Sixth Commandment. **“You shall not commit adultery.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.”

Samaritans believed that the Books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, were God’s Word, including this commandment. The woman knew she was a sinner before God. She could not have had a good reputation in her community.

How should we think of this woman’s situation? We might be quick to hold her up as an example of a “loose woman,” but what about the men she had married or lived with apart from marriage? A man marrying a divorced woman like this is just as much an adulterer according to God’s Word as that woman. She appears to be troubled and hurting, confused and vulnerable to men who wanted to take advantage of her. Those men were sinfully using her. She had a strong desire for marriage, a natural desire which was created in her by God, but she was not seeking the sort of spouse or relationship that God wanted for her or would bless.

Living water from Jesus addresses sin and supplies our need for God’s forgiveness.

The woman did not want to talk to Jesus about her situation or her sin. She tried to deflect Jesus to a discussion of differences between Jews and Samaritans and their expectations of the coming Messiah, the Christ. She contrasted the Samaritans worshiping God on a mountain, probably nearby Mt. Gerizim, and Jews worshiping on the temple mount in Jerusalem, Mt. Zion. Jesus was happy to go down that road. He was God's Christ who had come to save her from sin and unbelief. Jesus' answer was to point to a worship of God the Father on neither mountain, but **in Spirit and in Truth**. By this worship she would receive living water. What was Jesus talking about?

Earlier in John's Gospel we are told that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, was baptized in the water of the Jordan River. There God the Father declared Him His beloved Son and the Holy Spirit descended on Him as a dove. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the God into whose name we are baptized. Jesus' Word to the woman pointed toward her need for a water baptism in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of her sins. **"The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and Truth."**

Our Bible editors only capitalize God the Father here. I think they miss the point by not also capitalizing "Spirit" and "Truth." John's Gospel identifies Jesus, God's Son, as "Truth" incarnate, and Jesus' Spirit is the same Holy Spirit that comes from the Father. Jesus' encounter with this woman flows from the first verses of this chapter, about Jesus' baptizing: **"Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples), He left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a town of Samaria"** (4:1-5a), which is where our Gospel Reading today picks up.

Baptism's water is a **"a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** Baptism's forgiving water with Word is a well that never dries up for us. We keep going back to it and its promise of the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. We need that forgiveness for our sins just as much as that woman did. Jesus offers it to her and to us in Baptism.

John's Gospel also brings together water and Spirit at Jesus' cross. As He was dying, Jesus said, "**It is finished,**" and **He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit**, the same Spirit who descended on Him at His baptism. After Jesus died, the soldier whose job it was to prove Jesus dead before His body be allowed to be removed from the cross pierced His side with a spear, "**and at once there came out blood and water**" (19:20, 34).

The first Communion Distribution Hymn, the beautiful Lenten hymn by James Montgomery, "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain" (*LSB* 435), ties all these thoughts together. Some keep phrases:

- 1 *...Here a pure and healing fountain Flows for you, for me, for all,
In a full, perpetual tide, Opened when our Savior died.*
- 2 *...Wash your robes and make them white.*
- 3 *Come in sorrow and contrition, Wounded, impotent, and blind;
Here the guilty, free remission, Here the troubled, peace may find.
Health this fountain will restore; They that drink shall thirst no more.*
- 4 *They that drink shall live forever; 'Tis a soul-renewing flood.
God is faithful; God will never Break His covenant of blood,
Signed when our Redeemer died, Sealed when He was glorified.*

Baptism's spring welling up to eternal life washes our robes and makes them white in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We sinners, hungry and thirsty for the forgiveness of our sins, sick in body and soul and with troubled consciences, have health restored to us from this fountain. We drink God's forgiveness of our sins in Holy Absolution and we thirst no more. The fountain from Jesus's side pours into the cup of blessing in the Lord's Supper. We eat Jesus' body so we hunger no more and we drink His blood so we thirst no more, and we will live forever. We can keep coming to this well in faith; it will never run dry.

Jesus says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
Lord, give us this water so we will never be thirsty forever! Amen.