

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Many themes in John's Gospel are subtly woven together. When you step back, you see a beautiful image of Jesus on the tapestry. Just before our text, John begins battenning a weft through John the Baptist, who speaks of being a friend of the bridegroom. John then begins picking the warp as Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, as the one who has the bride. We find Jesus at a well. In Scripture, wells are a good place to find a bride, especially wells outside the borders of Israel. The bride then accompanies her husband, or his servant, on a journey to the land of promise. And so Jesus, the Bridegroom, wearied from His journey through Samaria, sat beside a well.

It was about the sixth hour, high noon. We will hear of the sixth hour again in chapter nineteen, another warp on the weft of Jesus' crucifixion. For now, we see a woman from Samaria coming at this hour to draw water. Why would anyone come at the hottest time of day? Likely she wasn't welcome with the respectable women in the cool of the day. She surrendered her respectability long ago. But today a man was there. She was relieved when she recognized Him as a Jew. He wouldn't acknowledge her.

She begins to draw water. But then, He spoke. "Give me a drink." It was a simple request for kindness, but she had grown into the suspicious sort. Folks say they want one thing, but when you give it, they take something else. Besides, He was a Jew. Why was He talking to her at all? She poses an attitude. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" This just didn't happen.

He 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, and he would have given you living water." If you knew the gift of God, "God so loved the world He gave His only begotten son, whoever believes in Him has eternal life." Jesus is God's gift, both as God and as the gift. He's testing her, yet He means every word. He wants to give her living water, the sort that brings eternal life. Water He associates with the Holy Spirit, pouring forth from Him, bringing us the gift of Jesus' own unending life. But she thought of fresh, spring water. Seeing that He has nothing to draw with, she grows impatient and annoyed. So she picks a fight.

But Jesus has no interest in a fight. He wants to save her. So Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks 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." The water of the Spirit pouring forth from Christ is the only thing that finally quenches thirst. Yet she has no idea this is the water she's been longing for.

Thirsty souls aching for this living water, not even realizing that's what we need. That's our nature. Like this woman looking for love in all the wrong places. This water becomes in us a spring that wells up into eternal life. It's a source of love so joyous and infinite that we never thirst for such love again. How much did she understand? Not much, but enough. Jesus is taking her on this journey to the promised land. She asks, "Sir, give me this water so I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." Unspoken, but maybe implied, "all alone, by myself, in the heat of the day."

She goes beyond Nicodemus, who wanted to know "how can these things be?" She asks, ventures to dare, to desire *for herself* this mysterious gift that Jesus is offering, even though she doesn't yet grasp the depths of it. So Jesus said, "Go call your husband and come here." She winces and replies softly, "I have no husband." I don't imagine Jesus looked away but in her eye, speaking with a gentleness that astonished and awed, "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." Jesus demonstrates His divine knowledge. He knows things about her. He knew this woman in her failed journey for love and the sin and mess she made of her life. He knows your journey too.

But her acknowledgment was an attempt to hide the whole truth. That's how we play the game, from Adam and Eve running to hide in the garden to the present to when you try to deflect someone's insight into the truth of your mess. But the one sitting at the well, holding her gaze, is the one before whom all

hearts are open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are hidden. No partial truths work with Him. He sees the whole mess and disaster that you can't even begin to bring yourself to face up to. He sees all of it. And miracle of miracles, He loves you.

He loves you, not just what He's making out of you. Filthy sinner in your mess exposed before His eyes. You're the one He loves, the one He woos. She's not ready to believe, so she attempts to divert. "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say in Jerusalem is where people ought to worship." Safe dodge into theology, she thought. "Let's not talk about me, my life, the ache to be loved that has gone unanswered all these years in all these men. I can't deal with that...So, which is it, Jerusalem or here?"

He's tender once again. Instead of exposing her attempt to divert, He answers. And the last of her pride slips away. She hoped that maybe, even though *her* life was a disaster, her people still had something good going. But no. He rules that out, too, by making a startling claim. "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." The hour is coming, another weft thread. Jesus is fixed on the hour. When the hour comes, things really change. In the past, God gave specific places where He attached His promise of grace. That's not how it will be when His hour arrives. But until that hour, you Samaritans are wrong and rebellious. You're not worshipping at the Lord's appointed place as the Jews do.

"For salvation is from the Jews." That is, the world's Savior comes from them. Rescue from that horrid, empty lovelessness and ache comes from them. But Jesus wants to let her and us know what changes when His hour arrives. "But 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." How backward we get things! We talk about seekers, people looking for God. But look whom Jesus says is seeking: not us, but God! He is seeking worshippers. Not people to stand before Him telling Him how wonderful He is, but true worship is always in receiving the gifts of God. That's how this started, "If you knew the gift of God and who is asking you, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Receiving what God sent Jesus to give *is* true worship. True worshippers receive His gifts in the Holy Spirit and in "capital T" Truth. That is, in Jesus. To worship the God who is Spirit is to worship Him the Holy Spirit way, in the truth of Him who is full of grace and truth. It is to receive what the Spirit and the Son come to deliver to you from the Father, not just in Jerusalem but wherever you find the Son seeking the lost through the Spirit with His Words.

The woman takes another step toward the promised land. "I know the Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus reveals, "I, who speak to you, and he." He has exposed the wound in her heart and dealt with her in kindness and mercy. He told her the Father is seeking her, knowing her whole story, to receive His good gifts for her. "Could it be," she wonders. "Could it possibly be that the one long promised is here, that this One is the Messiah?" The people waited for the One who would clarify, tell them all things, make sense out of the senseless and confusing life they found themselves in. Jesus tells her, "That's me. That's who I am, the Messiah. I've shown you that I know all about you. And still, I tell you the Father wants you to for Himself, Samaritan and sinner that you are."

Thus, the heavenly Bridegroom woos His bride. She was aching for Jesus without ever realizing it. All the dissatisfaction of her life led to this moment so that the Bridegroom could be revealed to her beside the well, seeking her, in fact, waiting for her because He knew she would come. And here you are, besides the wells of Salvation, the sacred Scriptures, the gifts of Christ for you. He's been waiting here for *you*. He says the same to you; desires to give you the same living water. God knows your story, your whole story. He knows everything you've done. He knows your mess, and He still seeks you to worship Him. He desires to give you His gifts: the Holy Spirit and life everlasting in Christ. He is the one you've been aching for your whole life, whether you know it or not. So drink up, and drink deeply. Amen.