Psalm 95, umh 814
John 4:5-42

He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some water to drink.”

His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food. The Samaritan woman asked, “Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (Jews and Samaritans didn’t associate with each other.) Jesus responded, “If you recognized God’s gift and who is saying to you, ‘Give me some water to drink,’ you would be asking him, and he would give you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you don’t have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!”

Jesus said to her, “Go, get your husband, and come back here.” The woman replied, “I don’t have a husband.” “You are right to say, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus answered. “You’ve had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn’t your husband. You’ve spoken the truth.” The woman said, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You and your people worship what you don’t know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. But the time is coming—and is here! —when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth.” The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us.” Jesus said to her, “I Am—the one who speaks with you.”

Just then, Jesus’ disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who has told me everything I’ve done! Could this man be the Christ?” They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus. In the meantime, the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” Jesus said to them, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.” The disciples asked each other, “Has someone brought him food?” Jesus said to them, “I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘Four more months and then it’s time for harvest’? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. Those who harvest are receiving their pay and gathering fruit for eternal life so that those who sow and those who harvest can celebrate together. This is a true saying that one sows and another harvests. I have sent you to harvest what you didn’t work hard for; others worked hard, and you will share in their hard work.” Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s word when she testified, “He told me everything I’ve ever done.” So, when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. Many more believed because of his word, and they said to the woman, “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.”

Jesus had been in Judea, teaching and healing. When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had attracted more followers than John the Baptizer had when he was alive, Jesus decided that it was time to head back to Galilee. On his was, he passed through Samaria. It would have taken days to go around. The problem was that there was
a long history of Jews and Samaritans not agreeing on theology and worship practices. It dated back to the time of the Exile. And the hard feelings ran deep. Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other. It was a long walk through Samaritan land. There were no rest stops, no fast food restaurants, or mini marts to buy food or drink. Jesus was tired, and he was thirsty. So, he sat down next to a historic well and waited while his disciples went into the nearest town to try to buy food.

While he was waiting, a woman came to draw water; a task that women routinely did as part of their day. For women in some parts of the world, getting the water for her household is still part of their daily routine. I can’t imagine. Every day, walking, sometimes miles, to the nearest well or spring or river to get the water needed for drinking and cooking and washing. Every day, drawing the water and then walking back. Do you know how heavy water is? A US liquid gallon of water weighs about 8.34 pounds. How much water do you think that your household needs in a day? This is the amount that a woman would need to carry.

Jesus had no way of drawing water from the well to quench his thirst, so he asked the woman to draw some for him. It would have been unusual, and a little scandalous for a Jewish man to talk to a woman he wasn’t related to like that, and not just any woman but a Samaritan woman at that. Jesus asked her for water. And the woman realized that it was more than unusual, and a little scandalous for him to talk to her this way. It also gave her the upper hand, or so she thought. “How can you ask me for a drink? You a Jew, and me a Samaritan.” But there is more going on here. Jesus offers her living water, and she misunderstands. Living water, drink it and you will never be thirsty. And the woman is thinking of how wonderful it would be if she didn’t have to come to the well and carry water every day.

This was a woman who was tired. Life had been hard on her. She had been married several times. We don’t know why. How many times was she widowed? How many times had she been forced to marry the brother of a husband who died? How many times had she been discarded? How many times had her heart been broken? She was probably not young anymore and was living with a man that she was not married to. I know women, older women, widows usually, that have made that choice, to live with someone and not marry them. For most it’s about survival. They cannot afford to live by themselves. Their tiny income, social security, maybe a small pension, does not cover the necessities. It makes sense to share household expenses with another person. And if they were to marry, in most cases, the women would lose whatever death benefits she had from her husband. Loneliness factors in of course. I have seen older couples like this care for each other through declining health.

It is a hard choice that many women face. It was even harder in the first century when a woman had even fewer choices than they do today and living alone was not an option. This woman was worn out and used up. Her spirit was dry and parched. Jesus saw how tired she was, and he acknowledged how hard her life had been. He saw how broken she was, how worthless she felt. Jesus did not offer her judgment or blame. Nor did he offer her pity. Jesus offered her living water. Jesus offered her the healing balm that she needed for her dry and parched spirit. A spring of water welling up to eternal life. What is this living water that Jesus offers, this water that bubbles up into eternal life?

The living water that Jesus offers is God’s grace, bubbling up and overflowing. Living water is God’s love freely flowing and available to all the parched, dried out, thirsty people of the world. Jesus is offering, grace to a woman who desperately needs it and feels unworthy of receiving it. Jesus offers God’s grace to a woman who is not even a Jew, not one of the people who were considered God’s chosen.

Jesus did not put limits or conditions on receiving living water. All the woman would have to do is ask. Times were changing; the world was being turned upside down. No longer would people have to worship on a
particular mountain. The time had come; the time is here, for all to worship God in spirit and truth. God is spirit, and the spirit blows where it will. God is not confined to a particular mountain or temple. God’s grace is not given just to a particular group of people.

We are all thirsty. Life has given us all different challenges. Jesus knows what your challenges have been. Jesus knows what it is that you struggle with. Jesus knows your past and your present. Just as Jesus told the woman everything she had done, Jesus knows everything you have done, and why you did it. Jesus knows the mistakes you have made, and the decisions you have struggled with. And Jesus offers you grace. Jesus offers you living water, bubbling up to eternal life.

The woman at the well responded to this living water, this grace, by running back into the village to tell others. She couldn’t keep it to herself. She had been filled with the living water that bubbled up inside of her and overflowed, and she wanted, no she needed to share it with others. Have you experienced living water, bubbling up inside of you and overflowing?

Let us Pray: Holy One, pour on us your living water, we pray, for we are tired and thirsty. We are tired of temporary solutions to our challenges, tired of water that doesn’t refresh; tired of needing to feed our addictions again and again never feeling satisfied. We are in need of your grace, thirsty for your living water. Pour your living water on all who need it this day. Pour it out on all those who are tired of living, pour it on those who have lost hope, pour it on those who don’t know they need it and those who don’t think they need it, and those who don’t believe that it is available to them, and those who don’t know that it exists. Pour it on young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak.

Help us to remember that your living water never runs out. That there is enough for everyone; and that the more people receive it, the better off we will all be. Let your living water fill us to overflowing so that we run to share it with others. For it is time for all of us to be filled, and for all of us to worship you in spirit and truth, now and always. Amen.