

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

For thousands of years, First Nations people have walked on this land – a relationship that is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

PWS&D Message ***Education Helps Make Dreams Possible***

Education is vital to overcome poverty, reduce gender and economic inequality, and foster a peaceful society.

In a poor neighborhood of Guatemala City, where many families struggle to get by through scavenging in a waste disposal site, PWS&D supports an education program with the Francisco Coll School. This provides not only primary school education, but also includes continuing education scholarships for graduating students so that they may find a better livelihood. This presents the opportunity to break cycles of poverty by opening doors to the job market.

Ingrid was one of six students to receive this scholarship, which enabled her to continue her studies. Today she proudly holds the title of an accountant.

“I want to thank God for the blessings and opportunities that God has given me through the support received from the Francisco Coll Educational Center, an establishment in which I took my first steps in the process of my education. I appreciate the financial support that has helped me to achieve an important stage in my life,” she expresses with gratitude.

This Lenten season, be thankful that we are able to help make sure children have access to quality education so that they can build bright futures.

➤ ***Let us build a house (verse 2)***

PWS&D Lenten Liturgy

Written by Jim Goring and the Rev. Ian Fraser (Pointe Claire, Quebec)

Just as the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness,

the Spirit sends us into places of uncertainty where we confront our weakness & insecurities.

Here we are taught to pay attention to those whom others discard.

Jesus insists that God is revealed in unlikely people.

Jesus offered living water to the Samaritan woman at the well who was the wrong religion, the wrong gender, and had the wrong marital status.

We, too, are a gathering of nobodies, yet Jesus claims us as somebodies who all have a place.

In Christ, there is neither insider nor outsider, invited nor shunned, accepted nor rejected.

We, too, are called to see beyond outdated categories and to offer living water to the thirsty.

It is those who have been rejected who most need to know acceptance.

Let our gatherings be a place for those who have been told they don't belong.

➤ *Come, let us sing to the Lord our song* 412

† Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / sung Words of Hope

Almighty God, you give the water of eternal life through Jesus Christ – may we always thirst for you, the spring of life and source of goodness.

We gather here today, glad of this chance to come together in worship. For you are our God – the one in whose presence we find the answer to the deepest longings of our hearts.

Take these moments, we pray, and make them a time of blessing. Take our lives, in all their beauty and brokenness, and make them whole and holy. We seek your mercy in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord who encourages us to pray together... ***Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ *How deep the peace (repeat) – please remain seated*

† Prayer for Understanding

Gracious God, you provide for our lives. You supply us with water to satisfy our spirit's thirst. You gift us with words that speak peace and make whole. Speak today to our questions and encourage us to witness always to your grace. Amen

Scripture

Exodus 17: 1-7 [OT page 64]

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?"

But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

John 4: 5-42 [NT page 94]

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus 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."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks, drank from it?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

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 have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

Well – well – well...

I can't hear the word without thinking of Steve's father Fred who died more than 30 years ago. You see, he had these sayings – what Steve and I refer to as "Fredisms". He had one for the word well – not likely original but here it is...

"Well...", "you'd begin.

And Fred would promptly interject, *"That's a deep subject – careful you don't fall in."*

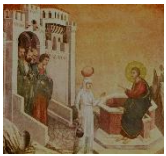


Today's story takes place at a well and we need to take care that we don't fall in because it's a deep story with layers of meaning. It is long and obtuse – what looks like a simple conversation can leave us with superficial understanding that will fail to satisfy our hunger or our thirst.

Since I don't want us to drown in the living water that is this text, rather than fall headlong, let's take it a sip at a time – touching down in a few places and absorbing just a taste of the abundant artwork depicting the scene!

Let's begin with traveling in Samaria...

The gospel verses leading to our selection today say that Jesus *had to go through Samaria*. Samaria sat between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south, and those travelling from one to the other would most naturally pass through it. From an earthly point of view this presents some problems since Samaria was a place of dispute, a place that the purebreds disparaged, for the Samaritans were only partly Jewish. Samaria was the strange place, the half-breed place, the place you are not supposed to visit if you are well brought up! Did you have a section of town when you were growing up that you were not supposed to visit? I did. Two thousand years ago, that place was Samaria!



Perhaps there is still some out of bounds area for you. Are there parts of our city that you avoid because you consider them alien territory – every bit as foreign and dangerous as Samaria would have been for Jesus?

Conflict with Samaritans meant that most Jewish travellers took a longer route down the Jordan Valley to Jericho and then up to Jerusalem. The roots of the tension go back a long way but seem to have hardened with the construction of an alternative temple on Mount Gerazim. To non-Jews and other outsiders, this feud would have to be explained as John does in verse nine: *(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)*

The disciples likely saw Samaria as a place to pass through as quickly as possible – a sinful, dirty, spiritually tawdry place. Not a place to seek candidates for salvation. All their lives they had been taught to bracket out all Samaritans – to write them off. Jesus has a rather different perspective.

From a heavenly standpoint Jesus had to go through Samaria because it is divinely intended that he do so – it is part of his mission – part of God's plan. Jesus goes through the places that we think are off-limits – and immediately the plot thickens!

Like many stories, this one has elements that follow a specific pattern. In literary terms this is often called a motif...



When we hear about Jacob's well, we may think little of it except that it is a detail of location. For people of the time mentioning Jacob's well is like saying "9/11" today or "the Blitz" six or seven decades ago – it conjures an entire story – elicits history and emotion and judgment.

When a man comes to a well in the biblical witness, finds a woman there, and asks for a drink, it is the start of something momentous! Remember Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and

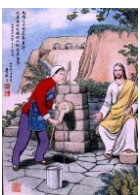
Rachel, Moses and Zipporah? After some conversation the woman runs home to tell her people what has happened and they return with her to the well – approve of the man – and they wed. Usually, this marriage results in a significant change in the life of the people. It is what is called a betrothal motif – similar to the prince and princess who meet in fairy tales and live happily ever after or to a Jane Austen tale where the two most in conflict throughout the story end up together and there is an extravagant wedding to end the tale.



Jesus rests at Jacob's well, a sacred site to both Jews and Samaritans because Jacob is their common ancestor, and it brings to the mind of all who hear it the scene of Old Testament meetings between future spouses at wells. In a sense Jesus is "wooing" the Samaritan woman to true worship and to a mission of spreading the word.

The writer tells us that the encounter takes place at about noon...

A waterhole has long been a place to gather and exchange news – discuss politics – to laugh and to gossip. An urban equivalent to the village well in today's gospel is the water cooler where office employees might gather for conversation – today it's likely Starbucks, Tim Horton's or some other coffee shop.



Picture this woman at high noon, when all sensible people are indoors, or sheltering in the shade of brushwood booths in the fields. Picture her picking up the large water jar, slipping out of her dwelling, and scurrying through town in the heat haze to Jacob's well. The timing of her visit to the well is a deliberate ploy to avoid the other women.

They came in the cool of the early morning, chatting and laughing together. And they will come again in the shade of evening, exchanging the gossip of the day. But this lonely woman makes the journey alone, perhaps to avoid scornful glances and barbed words. We don't know why she is the target but clearly she has decided that even the midday heat is preferable to denigration by her village sisters.

As already noted with the betrothal motif of the well, there is often a double meaning in the writing of John's Gospel. In addition to setting up this woman as an outsider, the detail of coming to the well at noon foreshadows that other noontime of Jesus on the cross when he will again cry out in thirst.

Jesus shocks the woman & the disciples by crossing conventional boundaries...



Perhaps you know that this conversation Jesus is said to have had with the Samaritan woman at the well is the longest recorded discussion he has with anyone in the Bible – and it should never have taken place. Jews don't speak to Samaritans. Men don't speak to women – certainly not without chaperones! A man doesn't ask a woman who is a stranger for a drink of water, placing himself in a position of vulnerability. Can you appreciate how radically Jesus is moving beyond acceptable bounds? How outrageous he is being? How bold?

From a young age we are often taught not to talk to strangers – not to cross boundaries. We learn that there are some people we are just not supposed to associate with. Two thousand years ago, Jews were not supposed to speak with Samaritans and men didn't chat with women. Jesus shatters all the taboos – gender discrimination, ritual purity, poverty, religious hostility, and potential moral stigma.



Living water is all about double entendre...

As we get into the meat of the conversation it becomes clear that this woman knows some theology! She has thought about spiritual matters. She's aware of the promised Messiah – knows something of the controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans about where God may (or may not) be appropriately worshiped. She is a woman thirsty for God.

The gospel employs the technique of misunderstanding to convey deeper truth. Jesus asks for a drink, and the woman responds with surprise that given the hostility between Jews and Samaritans, he would even speak to her, much less request a drink.

Jesus says that if she really knew the gift of God and Jesus' identity, she would be thirsting for living water – not only fresh, flowing water rather than well water, but also water that will give life. She asks for this water so that she doesn't have to keep coming to the well – does she misunderstand? – is she making a joke? – is she really asking for something much more profound?

What is this living water? Isn't all water living – or is some water lifeless?



(In this painting the artist has concentrated on the aspect of Jesus as the eternal water. The water is symbolized by the spiral, which is constantly in motion, because the spiral of God, the water of life, is always active.)

Dead water is the same old television show every night – the same old argument you get into every day – that little habit you persist in nourishing, small in itself, but which will kill

you one day. Dead water is what may have nourished somebody long ago but does not give you joy and vigor today – it leaves you crying out for something more.

This next bit is about the husband – about the husbands...



It has been the focus of the text for many preachers who speculate on the morality of women. It is most likely that this woman has been divorced or widowed – and don't forget that a man in that time could divorce his wife on the smallest pretext – valid or not. A divorced woman lost all status and value in the community. She was seen as rejected – a disgrace. Her own family wouldn't want her, and job opportunities were limited to say the least. A widow was not likely to get much better treatment.

The woman at the well was diminished – devalued – a tattered remnant of what God created her to be. Her encounters with men had left her damaged – her self-image shrunken.



There is double meaning in this too, however. The five husbands also refer to the five foreign masters who imposed their religion on the Samaritans. As a nation, they had intermarried with Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, the Ptolemaic Empire, and the Seleucid Empire compromising and corrupting their worship of the one true God. Now they were “in bed with” Rome. They had not adopted their practices but still consorted with them.

The five husbands correspond to the five false gods to which the Samaritans had given allegiance, leading to their present unfaithfulness: *“the one you have now is not your husband.”*

Where and how do we worship?

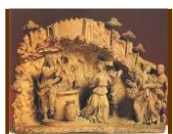
Does it matter where the people worship? Is Jerusalem preferable to Mount Gerazim? Jesus implies that the where is not as important as the spirit of worship. God is spirit, and those who worship God must do so in spirit and truth. We can too easily get caught up in details that don't really make much difference to God. It does not matter where your ancestors worshipped. Their arguments do not need to be your arguments. They were concerned with matters that are no longer a part of our lives.



What is important is that everyone gets thirsty – Jew, Samaritan, Gentile, Greek, Scot, Korean, man, woman – everyone gets thirsty. True worship is not national worship. It is worship within a community of believers! Worship *in spirit and in truth*.

In the age to come, which has already dawned with coming of the Messiah, people will be inspired in worship by the Holy Spirit – crossing all ethnic and status barriers. This is not a call for a vague romantic spirituality detached from time and place, but a promise of the universal reality Jesus had come to establish in the kingdom of God. Knowing Jesus as Messiah enables us to truly worship God at any time or place in one universal fellowship.

He cannot be the Messiah, can he?



The Samaritan woman responds to Jesus with insight. Long before Paul, this woman is the first missionary to the Gentiles. She is one of the first to recognize Jesus as being, possibly, the Messiah – a woman, a foreigner, a person of a marginalized people, and an outcast among those people. She becomes one of the earliest missionaries, going to tell her own people about him.

Amazing? This scorned woman, who an hour before slipped out of the town like a moral leper in order to draw water from the well, now has the confidence to go back with her head held high and preach to the people who had despised her. Her new dignity evidently impresses several in the Samaritan village. Remarkably many people put their trust in Jesus as a result of the woman's testimony. They invite this Jew – Jesus – and his Jewish disciples, to share their Samaritan hospitality for a few days.

This well is deep – abundant beyond measure...



The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well reminds us that the kingdom Jesus inaugurates is a realm of inclusion not exclusion – dignity not denigration – empowerment rather than exploitation – affirmation rather than marginalization. His simple request for a drink of water provokes a dialogue, teaching us that Jesus does not desire any human being to shrivel and die from a parched soul. Jesus longs to quench the deepest needs and desires of each one of us with the "living water" of divine Spirit.



Remember the water jug the woman brings to fill – the one she leaves behind as she returns to the city with her good news? As the Samaritans happily urge Jesus to abide with them a while, and the noisy bustle fades away from Jacob's well – as the bright glare of the noonday sun continues to blaze, we see the water jug and recall a woman who came to that well more thirsty than she knew. She left with her thirst quenched – sensing she'd never be truly thirsty again.

To encounter Jesus is to find life – a stream of living water – the source of living relationship with God who welcomes every person to drink deeply of what God alone can offer – abundant life. **Amen**

➤ *Come, let us to the Lord our God*

194

Offering and Prayer *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Having tasted the living water in Christ's love and forgiveness, we bring our gifts to God in gratitude for such refreshment and renewal.

Loving God, with our gifts we offer you our very selves, knowing you receive us as we are. Bless all that we have to offer, so that we may become gifts to those who encounter us through the grace of Christ our Lord. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

Revealing God, we seek to offer our prayers in spirit and in truth. We thank you for the truth of your love which welcomes us as we are, not as the world tells us we should be. Thank you for the truth of your mercy which embraces us even when you recognize our mistakes and failures. Thank you for the truth of your purpose which gives meaning and direction for our lives. And thank you for the truth of your vision which gives us hope for our future even in challenging times. Revealing God, guide us in spirit and in truth.

Revealing God, we seek truth for our times. We are surrounded by claims of truth and much that misleads. We pray for those who feel overwhelmed by so much information and misinformation. Grant us the ability to discern fact from fabrication – to recognize self-interest disguised as sincerity. Revealing God, guide us in spirit and in truth.

Revealing God, we seek truth in our history. We know that most history has been written by the winners so give us the willingness to hear stories that have been silenced. We pray for those who have stories that are difficult to tell. We remember especially stories related to the former Alberni Residential School operated by The Presbyterian Church in Canada at which many children died and unmarked graves have been located. Grant us both the courage to speak and to listen – the wisdom to recognize truth even when it makes us uncomfortable. Revealing God, guide us in spirit and in truth.

Revealing God, we seek truth in our characters and shared humanity. As we hear voices that are fearful, critical and cynical, help us listen for voices of respect, generosity and

those filled with hope. Show us the potential we have, to work together to find common cause even among those with differing perspectives. Instill in us the confidence that we might accomplish more than we can imagine right now, because, together, we have been created in your image. Awaken in and among us the potential to serve you by serving one another, knowing this is the way you are revealed to us in Jesus – friend and saviour. Revealing God, guide us in spirit and in truth. **Amen**

➤ *As water to the thirsty*

688

Blessing

As we continue our Lenten journey, may God's love strengthen your endurance, Christ's mercy refine your character, and the Spirit's power enliven your hope this day and in every day to come.

➤ *Bless the Lord (repeat)*