

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday in Lent (Series A)

March 19, 2017

Text: John 4:5–26<sup>1</sup>

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

“Is the Lord among us or not?” (Exodus 17:7). That was the question and dilemma that Israel, the children of Abraham, faced as they thirsted for water encamped at Rephidim in the wilderness of Sin. They weren't too far from Mount Sinai; but the desert was hot and barren. And the water was running low for hundreds of thousands of people, maybe millions, not to mention their cattle and livestock. So the quarreling began issuing forth from the natural desire for water. Why did God deliver us from Egyptian bondage if He was only going to bring us into the desert to kill us with thirst? Is He among us nor not?

The Lord instructed Moses, “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink” (Exodus 17:6). Because of God's patience and love, the people quenched their thirst for water. But the place was called Massah, which means testing, and Meribah, which means quarreling. That place became a proverbial warning to God's people not to rebel against the Lord. You heard it in today's Psalm, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, and on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work” (Psalm 95:7b–9). The foundational issue underlying this hardhearted testing and the quarreling was “Is the Lord among us or not?”

About 1,500 years after Massah and Meribah, another child of Abraham thirsted for water. But the location was different. He thirsted in the heat of the day, about noon, at a Samaritan town named Sychar, “near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well” (vs. 5–6). The Lord Jesus thirsted for water but had no means to gather water from Jacob's well. So He sat there.

---

<sup>1</sup> This sermon is prepared with hearty thanks for my forefather in the faith: Martin Luther, especially his fourth sermon on John 4 found in AE 22:522–530.

A woman of Samaria arrived to draw water for herself (vs. 7). This situation would raise the eyebrows of John's 1<sup>st</sup> century readers. She's got three strikes against her: 1) she's a Samaritan – Jews and Samaritans despised each other, 2) she's a woman, alone with no husband, father, or brother – upstanding Jewish men didn't speak with unaccompanied women in public; 3) she's a woman of suspicion – she's had 5 husbands – living under sinful circumstances – she's cohabitating with a man not her husband. Conventional propriety said that Jesus shouldn't have anything to do with this woman.

In fact, she's just as surprised when Jesus asks her to give Him a drink of water (vs. 7). “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (vs. 9a) And then John adds a parenthetical comment that heightens the strangeness of the situation, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (vs. 9b).

Jesus is certainly thirsty but His primary concern isn't His thirst for natural water but her need for spiritual, life-giving water. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “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” (vs. 10). Living water! That would be something good to have. But how? There are no springs around here and you don't even have a bucket with which to draw water! Are you, O Jewish man, greater than our father Jacob, the great patriarch of our nation?

Herein lies the great mystery of Jesus. He's tired, thirsty, and needing help from a questionable Samaritan woman in order to get a drink from Jacob's well. And yet, this otherwise weak and helpless looking Man claims to give living water that “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirst forever....(and it) will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (vs. 13–14). Is it possible for this Man to give living water?

So we're back to the question faced by the children of Israel 1,500 year earlier. “Is the Lord among us or not?” On a hot, high noon day, an ordinary Jewish Man claims to do that which only God can do: give eternal life, even to a sinful, Samaritan woman. He genuinely offers this living water of salvation to 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” (vs. 10).

The Samaritan woman perceives that Jesus is a prophet. But when He asks her to call her husband – remember, she had not husband but was living with a man she wasn't

married to – she switches the direction of the conversation to the location of proper worship. “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship” (vs. 20). Is the Lord here, on Mt. Gerizim, or is He in Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion? Is the Lord among us or not? It’s the age old contention between the true and the false church (Luther, AE 22:524).

Our Lord’s answer changes everything. It provides absolute certainty as to where living water can be found. Jesus says:

<sup>21</sup>“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (vs. 21–24).

The true worship of God is no longer bound to a particular location – Mt. Gerizim, Jerusalem, Rome, St. Louis, Wittenberg, etc. – but to a particular Person, the one who gives living water! Wherever Jesus has promised to be, there the true worship of the Father will take place in Spirit and in truth.

The Lord Jesus promises to give to us sinners living water unto eternal life. Wherever this living water – the Holy Spirit who creates, sustains, and refreshes saving faith through the saving Gospel of Jesus’ perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father’s right hand in glory – is being poured forth, there Spirit and truth worship is located. There God is among us.

The question that presents itself to us today – March 19, 2017 – is “Is God among us or not?” Are we the true church? What do you find here at Immanuel/St. John’s Lutheran Church? If you invite someone to our worship service and tell them that God is among us here, what will they, in fact, see and hear? There is a man speaking to us. The voice is that of your pastor. Why listen to him? Are there not others who speak more clearly, more winsomely? Who can entertain better with superior articulation, humor, and wisdom? Why, that pastor claims to speak God’s Word but he’s a sinner just like everyone else. How can he speak the words of life and truth?

So you see, dear saints of God, we’re back to the dilemma faced by the Samaritan woman with Jesus. He claims to give living water unto eternal life but He can’t even get a simple drink from Jacob’s well. Can God’s living water come to us through such

humble means? The same Jesus who claims to give living water would eventually die a horrible, bloody, tortuous death. And He claims that His death by crucifixion is salvation for the world. He promises to do what no one has ever done before...rise from the dead and never die again for the peace and justification of all sinners. But He can't even get a drink of water for Himself! Are we to believe all these extraordinary claims? Yes! A million times yes.

Wherever Christ Jesus is preached in truth and purity and His precious sacraments are rightly administered, there Jesus is, giving us living water. Even though these precious gifts come to us through a weak, frail, sinful pastor, we believe, nonetheless, that "when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself" (Small Catechism, Part V). When your pastor, whoever he may be at any given time, preaches, baptizes, distributes Christ's body and blood, retains and absolves sins, it is actually Jesus who is preaching, baptizing, communing, disciplining, and forgiving. There, Jesus is giving living water!!

That is why we train ourselves to thirst for Christ's gifts which come to us through the humble means of inspired Words and Sacraments. Through these we drink living water unto eternal life. Seek nothing else! For there are many other sources that tempt us to satisfy the desire for God through sinful, unsatisfying means. Do not seek them!!

The apostle Paul describes this great wonder of God working through weakness and humility to give His eternal gifts in I Corinthians 1:27–31:

“<sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

The Jews and Samaritans of Jesus' day, the children of Israel in Moses' day, were all asking the question, “Is the Lord among us or not?” The Lord Jesus, our precious Savior, promises to be with us by the power of the Holy Spirit to give us living water wherever His saving Word and Sacraments are administered. Our baptism, the Lord's

Supper, the Gospel of life and salvation, our hope of forgiveness, peace, justification before our heavenly Father, the assurance of our resurrection unto eternal glory are not bound to a particular place but to Jesus and His Word. The Lord is among us whenever and wherever His Gospel is proclaimed!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.