

Thirsting for more
Jubilee Mennonite Church
Bryce Miller
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Purpose: To connect our most elemental human need to our need to be shaped by God.

Message: As people of great desires, our desire for connection to God must be part of our deepest satisfaction.

The Big Idea: Our desire to be known is among our most basic of urges. We are invited to have this thirst quenched as we are known by the one who created us, known in God's son.

Scriptures: John 4:5-15, 25-29 I will read, Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11

Synopsis: Thirst, real thirst, makes all other scarcities pale in comparison. We can go for quite some time without food, sleep, and other necessities of life. But we know that having our thirst quenched is an utmost need which cannot be long ignored. When we thirst, really thirst, there is little else we can concentrate on, and we cannot long survive without our thirsts being quenched. Yet often we find ourselves denying or avoiding our spiritual thirst, being driven away into the categories of seeking, wondering and wishing that we might be filled. We are shaped by what we thirst after, what ever it is. We are called to fill our thirsts with the real sustenance of an encounter with God.

John 4:5-15

⁵ So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

⁹ 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.)

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ The woman said to him,

"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.
Where do you get that living water?"

¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob,
who gave us the well,
and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her,
"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,
¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ 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."

John 4:25-29

²⁵ 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."

²⁶ Jesus said to her,
"I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ 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?"

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar
and went back to the city.

She said to the people, ²⁹

"Come and see a man
who told me everything I have ever done!
He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Thirst is an insidious thing. It has a way of sneaking up on you without you realizing what is going on. But once it has taken hold, and you are really thirsting, needing refreshment, there is little else we can think of but how we thirst and our need to satisfy that thirst. Living in the desert you learn a lot about what it is to be thirsty, and not just in the cartoon-character-opening-a-sand-filled canteen sort of way. In that environment you learn quickly and clearly the need for water, and what can happen when your thirst overtakes you. Because ironically there, you don't particularly think about how much sweat you are producing, the water you are burning through or the rest. The air is so dry that you don't even feel all the sweat as it evaporates away. In that climate you learn that when you are actually thirsty, you should have likely been drinking for a while already. When you feel what is missing, you are actually already approaching a deficit.

One interesting thing about John 4 and this interchange between Jesus and the woman at the well is that it comes right after John 3. Which is blatantly obvious and among the more insane considerations. But remember what John 3 is about: here we have Nicodemus, the Pharisee sneaking around the middle of the night seeking Jesus' opinion on what it means to inherit eternal life, and talk about what it means to reach out for God. "If you want to be born into the world of life," Jesus offers, "You must be born from above." Jesus takes an ordinary encounter and turns it into the extraordinary comment about what it means to live spiritually, and not just physically. Now here in the light of day, some weeks later and distance later, he encounters another seeker. As Jesus is want to do, he sees things for their deeper meaning than just what things appear to be. This woman comes to do what she needs to do—get water—another task for another day. But Jesus sees that the true thirst she carries is not, ultimately, for the life sustaining well, but the soul sustaining nourishment for someone who has seen much and lived, we find out, a complicated, all too real life. Her thirst is catching up to her, whether she has realized it or not. Both these stories tell us something about what it is to be when we are seeking to live in God's kingdom.

We are all thirsting for something. Our thirsts, our desires that long to be quenched hold a great deal of power over us, distracting us time and again to consider the need that we wish to satisfy. When I am truly thirsty, usually for a soda or something which is not the best thing for

me in the first place, it is all that I can do to keep my mind in the present, and not on that which I desire. My desire to be satisfied becomes so demanding that it is all I can do to remain in the present without considering what it is I am thirsting for. This thirst is no less imperative or directive when we find it within our souls. We may not be able to name it, we may not be able to even understand it, we may not be even able to realize that we have a spiritual thirst at all, but we often know on an intuitive level that we are thirsting after a quenching of a spiritual need, that a spiritual dryness has entered our lives. So much so that in the demands of daily life and living, and occasionally dry places in our lives, often by the time we are able to articulate our thirst—for God, for fulfillment, for nearness, for healing—what ever it is, our need has already become quite dire. But once we become aware of it, our thirst for the holy, for relief, can be our dominating distraction, blinding us to all else.

Yet, often we struggle to acknowledge that we are indeed thirsty for God. If we are with God, it is reasoned, and we are often told, we need never thirst again. Indeed, this very story and Jesus' promise of eternal water within the soul is often used to explain why we shouldn't be thirsty. If you are with God, and if God likes you, then all will automatically be well with you, and you needn't worry about your spiritual thirst ever again. But we know that this is not true. The life of faith often contains periods of struggle, exhaustion, and longing. Often, even those who we look to as examples of the faith are the ones who have struggled in this way. Mother Teresa whose charity and love inspires many, and who is being fast tracked to sainthood wrote extensively and often about the thirst she felt for a sense of the holy. We see this time and again within spiritual writers, and I think on an instinctive level we know this to be true of ourselves. We do not always feel energized for the work of love. We are not always on fire with the passion of life and hope. Sometimes we know what it is to feel the desert around us, and our deepest selves running dry. Yet most of the time we keep it to ourselves because we have received the notion that this is somehow a failure of the spiritual plumbing within, that all we need do is find the right valve to restore the life-giving stream within.

Like Nicodemus before this story, we don't always follow what Jesus Here is where I think that Jesus' use and adaptation of the ordinary things of his world to explain the big ideas of the life of the spirit and the calling of disciple leaves us in the dust. Or rather that we have left

this in the dust. In our modern North American context, accustomed as we are to receive clean, healthy water in here-to-fore unheard of abundance with the mere twist of a tap, we find ourselves distanced to the assumptions that were at work here. For Jesus some 1900 years before the advent of indoor plumbing, and the woman seeking her daily water and so much more, water always took intention. Life revolved around water—where to get it, how to maintain it, and all the rest. Society organized itself around sources of water. A good well, one that could be counted on in quantity and quality, was something to be jealously guarded as prized property and handed down from generation to generation. But there was always work, always practices, always intention to access even the best water. Day in; day out there was the walk, the drawing of the bucket and the long, careful progress back to use the water in daily life.

So it is with our spiritual wells. We must tend them. We must visit them. We must maintain our practices, drawing on our wells. This water of eternal life is there friends, it bubbles forth in places where, often, we least expect it and we most need it. It flows deep, steady, and coolly, and is always there if we but visit the well to draw from it. We have to draw from the well to drink from the well; and we must develop the practices in our lives that give us access to God's life giving waters. For some of us it is a practice that has been long developed over time and discipline that connects us with the divine. Sometimes it is a space or a place which has come to be a touchstone out of which the spring of life often flows. But whatever that practice is, we maintain it expecting to be met by God, trusting that we will be nourished by God's good waters that run deep.

But there is more here than us simply finding our wellspring of God's grace and maintaining it for our sake. There must be more than that. The woman who encounters Jesus at the well does not stop with merely finding a life giving well that she finds in this odd conversation with an odd man, but she shares the well with those around her. Again, it is not accidental that the well is often the feature around which a community is organized, dwelling at the middle of the life of the group. A source of life to meet the needs of all must be shared. We must share that Jesus is indeed our source of life. But we also need to do more than that. We need to share those places of life giving holy encounter with our community, with our family, as an invitation to all who would thirst and require a drink. We need to share our wells, our points

of access to the holy as a way of offering for others new and different ways of accessing the living waters that we all need. I need to share my well, and encounter the wells of others because the more ways we have to come and access the flowing waters beneath the surface, the better we can find new ways to quench our thirsts. It might be speaking of practice that works for us. It might be noticing and appreciating that there are those around us who are often running dry for a time, offering to come along side for a time. We may just need to offer the cup of spiritual water that is most needed by those seeking to quench their thirsts. But we are invited to our wells both in visiting and in sharing as an invitation to the generosity of grace which visits us all. We do this because we are body gathered, we are part of one another, and no dry time in our lives can ever change that.

Jesus meets us like the woman at the well: embracing us for who we are, and calling us as we are to come and follow. In following, our thirsts, our soul drying realities, are quenched when we seek, find, and share the wells of life giving water graciously supplied us by our creator who brings water to his people, even in the wilderness.

May we drink deep, love fully, and quench our thirsts in God's life giving stream.