

THE WELL THAT NEVER RUNS DRY

A Sermon on John 4:5–26

With Exodus 17:1–7 and Romans 5:1–8

March 8, 2026 The Third Sunday in Lent

I. The Ancient Well

There is a well in the city of Nablus, in the modern West Bank, that has been drawing water from the same source for approximately 3,500 years. Archaeologists have confirmed it. Pilgrims have photographed it. Christians have built a church over it. It is Jacob's Well — the very well where Jesus sat down, tired from his journey, and asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water.

It is still there. Still deep. Still cold. And on the day Jesus sat beside it, something happened at that ancient stone mouth that changed the world forever. He asked her for water. She pushed back — Jews didn't speak to Samaritans, and men didn't address strange women in public. And Jesus said something extraordinary:

"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."

Living water. Not stagnant. Not drawn from a hole in the ground. Water that springs up to eternal life. This sermon is about that water — who needs it, who offers it, and what it does to those who drink it.

II. The Law: What God Actually Requires

Before we can understand the gift, we must understand what the Father demands. And it is breathtaking in its scope.

The Lord is not satisfied with surface-level religion. He does not want spiritual consumers who browse faith like a buffet and take only the comfortable portions. Jesus uses a specific, stunning word: the Father seeks worshipers — actively searches for them — who will worship in spirit and in truth. Full surrender. Undivided hearts. Minds fixed on what is real, souls poured out in honest, searching devotion.

In Exodus 17, the Israelites are in the wilderness. God has already parted the Red Sea. Already rained bread from heaven. Already led them with a pillar of fire by night. His record of faithfulness is unbroken. And yet, when the water runs low, they do not pray. They do not trust. They quarrel, grumble, and threaten violence against Moses. "Is the LORD among us or not?" they demand.

Here is God's ancient, holy command, simple and unchanging: trust Him with your whole life. Love Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength. When the well runs low — when the cancer diagnosis comes, when the marriage fractures, when the bank account empties, when the nation seems to be coming apart — worship in spirit and in truth. Do not grumble. Do not demand that God prove Himself again. Do not run after what can never satisfy. That is the law. It is holy. It is right. It is good. And it is the standard by which we will all stand.

III. The Verdict: Every One of Us Has Gone to the Wrong Well

And now — the hard word. The honest word.

The Samaritan woman had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband. She came to the well at noon — the hottest, loneliest part of the day — because the other women of the village had long since stopped walking with her in the cool of the morning. She was isolated by her own choices. She had gone, husband after husband, to wells that could not hold water, searching for something that human love alone could never provide.

But let us not be too quick to judge her. She is simply the most visible among us.

How many of us have gone to the wrong well — again and again — looking for life where life cannot be found? We have gone to the well of achievement: if I can just get the promotion, the degree, the approval. We have gone to the well of romance and comfort and pleasure. To the well of political salvation, expecting some party, candidate, or movement to fix what only God can heal. We have gone to the well of distraction — numbing the deep ache with screens and substances and noise.

And like Israel in the desert, when those wells run dry, we do not fall on our knees. We grumble. We rage. We despair. "Is the LORD among us or not?" is the unspoken cry of every anxious heart that cannot sleep at three in the morning.

There is no one in this room who has loved God with their whole heart every moment of every day. Not one. There is no one here who has never chosen the shallow comfort of a counterfeit well over the deep, difficult, glorious faithfulness that God requires and deserves. The verdict for every one of us is the same: guilty. Parched. Running on empty. Dying of thirst.

IV. The Gospel: Living Water, Given in Blood

But hear what Jesus does not say. He does not say: "You should have known better. Try harder next time." He does not shame her and walk away. He stays at the well. He sees her fully — five husbands, the man she lives with now, the whole thirsty, broken story of her life — and He offers her living water anyway.

This is the Gospel in miniature. Paul writes it out in full in Romans 5: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Not after we cleaned ourselves up. Not after we demonstrated our worthiness. While we were still drinking from wrong wells. While we were still quarreling in the wilderness, demanding that God justify Himself. While we were still sinners.

The rock Moses struck in the desert — the rock from which water gushed out to save a faithless, grumbling people — the Apostle Paul would later tell the Corinthians that rock was Christ. Jesus is struck. Jesus bleeds. And from His wounds flow the water and blood that give life to a dying world.

That is not merely a beautiful metaphor. It is what happens at this altar. When your pastor speaks words of absolution over you, it is the risen Christ Himself pronouncing you forgiven — not someday, not provisionally, but now and completely, because He has already paid the full price. When bread and wine are placed in your hands and on your tongue, it is not ceremony or symbol. It is His body and blood — given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins. All five husbands. All the grumbling. Every wrong well you have ever visited.

You come to this rail thirsty. You leave with living water springing up within you. That is not mere churchmanship. That is the miracle at the center of every Sunday.

V. The Jar She Left Behind

Notice what happens after Jesus reveals Himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman. She leaves her water jar at the well.

She had come to draw physical water. She encountered the living God. And she left her jar behind — because she had something better now — and she ran back into the very town that had excluded her and cried out: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." The woman who had hidden at the hottest hour became the woman who filled the streets at midday with the best news the world has ever heard. She became the first evangelist to an entire people group.

This is what genuine forgiveness produces. It does not leave you lying in the dirt, ashamed and silent. It sends you. The peace with God that Paul describes in Romans 5:1 — peace obtained through our Lord Jesus Christ — is not a retirement from life. It is a commission into it.

When you return now to the commands of God — to worship in spirit and truth, to love your neighbor, to trust rather than grumble, to keep faith in the wilderness — you do not do so in order to earn what you have already been given. You do so because you have drunk from the right well at last, and it is overflowing. The Holy Spirit, no longer quenched, begins shaping you into the likeness of Christ — not by force, but by the quiet, persistent power of living water rising within you. And your life becomes a testimony. Not

a sermon you preach, necessarily, but a witness you are — a person from whom people can tell, something has happened to them. They have been to the well.

Polycarp, the second-century bishop of Smyrna, was arrested at age 86 and ordered to renounce Christ or be burned alive. He said simply: "Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" He was executed. Eyewitnesses reported he prayed and blessed God to the end. He died like a man who had drunk deeply, and was no longer afraid of thirst.

That is the fruit of the living water. Not fearlessness manufactured by willpower, but peace given by the One who knows everything you have ever done — and stayed at the well with you offering His water anyway.

Come to the Well

Jacob's Well is still there in Nablus, 3,500 years old, still drawing from the same ancient source beneath the earth. And the One who sat beside it — tired from His journey, fully God and fully man — is still here. Still offering.

"Whoever drinks of 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."

Come to the table. Receive the absolution. Drink the living water. Leave your empty jars behind. And then go — as the woman did — and tell somebody.

The well never runs dry.

Amen.

Pastor Ron Bright

Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

Join us for worship online on our Facebook page, [ChristLutheranChurchfh](#). There you can view our 10 am Sunday service live or view a recording at your convenience. There is no need to register with Facebook or log in to visit our page.