

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, May 13! Thank you so much for tuning in and joining me, and taking this moment out of your day to focus on God.

Today's topic weaves together well with what we've been talking about for the last couple of weeks, but gets a little bit more down in the spirit, down in the feels of things, so I'm excited to "dive" in with you today. Our topic is Living Water.

So as we begin to think about living water, please join me in a word of prayer:

*God we give you thanks for this opportunity to set our hearts and minds and spirits on you. Thank you for the many ways you are revealed to us, in all seasons of life, in all manner of feelings, in all states of our spirit. Lord we pray for your guidance, we pray for a sustaining of your peace, your grace, and your love in our spirits. We pray that our spirits may be nourished and made whole in your promises and in the life of your Son, Jesus. May we continue to see you and the world around us from a place of awe and gratitude. May our actions reflect your desire, to love you and our neighbors, in all that we do. And may your Holy Spirit be our guide and our advocate in all things. In your Son Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

When people ask how we are doing these days, it's really difficult to know how to answer. We can keep things on a surface level of "healthy", "fine", etc. Having to do with our physical state. But on a level deeper than just the physical realities, things are really hard right now. We have to juggle so much and are stressed on whole and new and different levels that we didn't think possible or ever necessary. We are tending the physical realities of staying alive and we haven't had as much opportunity to get below that surface level, to tend to the more tender parts of what it is to be human. We need ways to tend to our hurting hearts. We need spiritual nourishment. And that is what Living Water is all about. Living Water quenches the thirst of our spirits. Living Water is the very sustenance on which our souls depend. Living Water is what our spirits need to survive and thrive.

I'm going to read one of my all-time favorite bible stories to you today, a story that is always balm for my spirit. It's a unique story that provides both comfort and conviction, peace and energy, as I would say Living Water does too. Living Water is often hard to put into words, but of course, when we struggle to find the words ourselves, we must lean on the Word of God wholeheartedly.

So, this is John 4 verses 3-30:

Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. 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.

The Word of the Lord.

Of course there is a lot going on in this incredible story, but here's the main deal - Jesus takes things to a deeper level, beyond the surface. Because on the surface, there is so much to deter him, so much to make this connection unacceptable. But Jesus still goes there. And Jesus reveals God's power in him as the Messiah to this Samaritan woman.

A couple of things about this woman at the well. First, she is the only woman getting water at that time, around noon on that day. Why? Because she has been outcast by other people who don't want to accept her due to her five husbands. Most other women would have gathered water from the well early in the morning, right around sunrise, when it was cool out, because

hauling water is a physically demanding task, especially in this hot climate of what is now the Middle East. The fact that she has had five husbands is likely not her fault - perhaps she has been widowed five times. But the people refuse to see the situation for what it was and she likely wanted to avoid their surface-level judgment of her situation.

So this woman is already dealing with the pain of surface-level judgment even from the people who live in the same Samaritan city, and then a Galilean man sits down and asks her for water. As the scripture said, this is a highly unusual and even shocking thing to happen. Samaritans and Galileans don't share things, and men and women who aren't related do not just sit down and start talking to one another. Jesus is seriously pushing the boundaries here.

And so the conversation begins already in a place that is not familiar to either of them, and it begins on the surface level - Jesus asked for a drink of water. But of course Jesus takes things to a deeper level, and invites living water into the conversation, beyond just water quenching physical thirst. The woman responds in a matter that is also deeper, that she does not want to have to come back to the well every day, and face the challenges and pain she experiences on multiple levels.

But then Jesus states something personal and true about this woman, not from a place of judgment, but rather as an invitation to continue further in this deeper place. She recognizes him as a prophet and the conversation is on even more of a spiritual level. It is on this deeper level, of keeping things focused on God, that God is spirit and truth, that this woman fully understands Jesus. That she fully understands Living Water. It is not the surface-level judgments that determine our lives, it is our spirit and our creator God who gives us life. And then she is compelled, lives into this powerful call, to reach out and proclaim Christ the Messiah to all the people around her, even those who would judge her. She is filled with Living Water, the spirit and life of God, and shares that Good News abundantly.

Living Water is about getting out of our own heads, our own judgments and prejudices and fears, and moving towards a place of nourishing faith. We are all human. We are all in need of the same physical nourishment and spiritual nourishment as all other humans on this earth. And we are all loved and created and promised new life by the same creator God.

We have a deeper level of living, this persistent call that comes from the heart or the spirit. It's so strong and visceral that the brain can hardly keep up. It gets your heart rate up, your focus clearer, and yet fills you with a warm and calming peace. It's a desire, a deep longing for what I can only think to describe as nourishment, that we thirst and hunger for. It's the unexplained and deep satisfaction that takes us by surprise. This phenomenon is what Living Water is all about. And we find Living Water only in the promises and life of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Our spirits thrive in following our call to love God and love neighbors. And we find life for our spirits when we encounter Christ. This is why I've been encouraging spiritual practices in these devotions and beyond - the ways that we encounter Christ when we focus on Him are the ways

that our spirits are filled with Living Water. Focusing on Christ and God's work in the world is the balm that heals our spirits. And from that healed, filled, and nourished Spirit do we truly live into the abundant life promised in Christ Jesus.

So here is what I would love for you to try as a spiritual practice this week. I would love for you to send up a small prayer and remember God every time you encounter water. And yes, that is a lot of times a day, especially now when washing our hands a zillion times a day is a super helpful thing. But, using the physical sensation of water as a reminder helps us to dwell more in the realm of our spirits. We need the physical reminders of God's presence to help us focus on God's work in the world, truly all around us, the basis of nourishment for our spirits.

This practice can come forth when you're doing the dishes, taking a bath or shower, washing your hands, noticing rain outside your window, any and all types of water work spectacularly.

Every time we encounter water is an opportunity to remember the life-giving nature of water. The promises in baptism, the presence of the Spirit in all things, the new life Christ gives us abundantly. Water is such an essential part of life and there are so many ways we are blessed to encounter and be in relationship with it. And it's important to give ourselves consistent reminders of what our spirits need to be nourished. Often these sources of nourishment are connected to physical water, but think a level or two deeper. Allow your spirit and your sense of what it needs bubble up and fill you. And I hope that whatever does bubble up in need of care, that you have the support and care and time you need to tend to it in a loving, kind, and intentional way.

And if the spiritual nourishment you need involves help from me or anyone in your church family here at Mt. Zion, please do not hesitate to call or reach out to one another. I know how often the folks I call or even email or text are so glad to hear from someone at church (and I've heard similar stories from lots of folks), so reach out. Call a friend. Write a card and take that time to pray over a loved one. There are so many ways that reaching out to one another can lift our spirits these days, and that kind of nourishment is healing in so many ways.

And as we close out our time together today, I invite you to join me in the words our Lord Jesus taught us, the words to nourish our spirits in all times and places, the Lord's Prayer:

*Our 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.*

Go in peace, dear friends in Christ. Have a beautiful day. Thanks be to God. Amen.