

**The Way of Life: Water of Life**  
**John 4:1-15**  
**March 8, 2026 | Third Sunday in Lent**

In a sense, Jesus' ministry starts in the water. He launches into his ministry at his baptism, when the Father declares who Jesus is, "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well-pleased." But before formally starting his ministry, Jesus faces temptation in the wilderness. Satan tempts him to believe and behave like an earthly king. But Jesus rejects Satan's offer of earthly comfort, success, and power, and chooses instead to be a different kind of king, ruling over a different kind of kingdom.

Then, we talked last week about how, in a conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus confirmed his renunciation of a kingdom as based on race and nationality and rules. Instead, he tells Nicodemus that God's kingdom—eternal life—is a matter of being re-born into a new kind of life through God's Spirit.

And now, almost immediately after Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, we see Jesus making much the same point in a very different context. And, probably more importantly, he makes it crystal clear that the new and eternal life he has come to bring is available not just to the Jews, but to *everyone*.

So, most all of us know this story. Jesus shows up at a well in Samaria and, because he's hot and thirsty, he asks for some water from one of the women of the nearby village who's at the well drawing water.

So, let's stop right there. In that one-sentence there is SO much that's not right; so much that *should not* have been happening. First, Jesus was a man and she was a woman. In that culture it was not ok for a man to be talking to a woman who was not his wife out in public.

Second, he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritans pretty much hated one another.

And third, he was a holy man—a Rabbi—and she was almost certainly an outcast in her village, probably because they considered her a sinner. That's why she was going out to the well in the heat of the day by herself.

He should have had absolutely nothing at all to do with her, and she knows it. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

But Jesus doesn't appear concerned at all that she's "the wrong kind of people." And so, he reveals to her—an outcast Samaritan woman—what he only hinted at when he was talking to the Jewish holy man, Nicodemus. He—Jesus—is the water of life. He is the *source of living water*.

Now, as most of you know, water is necessary for life. I can testify. A few years ago, I took a hike around Stillhouse Hollow lake. It was going to be a pretty long hike so I planned my route meticulously. I packed plenty of snacks, brought plenty of sunscreen, wore my funny-looking hat. The only thing I forgot, was water. OK, I didn't completely forget it. I just didn't bring enough. It was one of the first hot days of the year and I was walking hard, so well before the planned end of the hike, I was little more than a huddled mass of pain and regret. I found out the hard way, water is necessary for life.

We know this. Most of the scientists will tell you life originated in the water and that every living thing depends on water in some way. Our bodies consist of about 60% water. Did you know that you can only survive without water for about 3 days, whereas you can survive without food for up to 3 weeks. Water is necessary for life.

And Jesus is making essentially that same point here, only a little different. Just as H<sub>2</sub>O is necessary for physical life, Jesus—the water of life—is necessary for true, born-again, eternal, spiritual life.

High quality H<sub>2</sub>O will satisfy your thirst—for a while. But the water Jesus provides gives never-ending satisfaction.

Now, at first the Samaritan woman doesn't understand what he's talking about. She thinks he's talking about real, physical, high quality H<sub>2</sub>O. And she's tired of going out to the well by herself in the heat of the day, every day, so she asks him, more or less as a joke, to get her some of that "living water."

Now, I want to point something out here. This Samaritan woman's response to Jesus is very different than the "holy man" Nicodemus'. Nicodemus also didn't understand what Jesus was talking about when he talked about being born again. But instead of engaging and seeking to go deeper, he simply disengaged. It didn't fit in with his understanding of the world, so it must be wrong. He's done.

On the other hand, this Samaritan woman gives as good as she gets. If you read the rest of Chapter 4, you see that she keeps after Jesus, following him as he leads her deeper and deeper towards the living water he has in store for her.

Last week, we saw in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus how Jesus rejected the prevailing Jewish understanding that the kingdom of God is based on national affiliation and following a set of rules. Eternal life in God's kingdom is based on just one thing: being born again, from above, through God's Spirit. Being born into a new kind of life which is as different from our physical lives as a newborn's life is different from when it was still in the womb.

And implicit in Jesus' understanding of eternal life is that it is available to everyone, not just those of a particular nationality, not just those who follow a particular set of rules. "For God so loved *the world* ...."

What Jesus implied in his discussion with Nicodemus, he makes explicit in his interaction with this Samaritan woman. She is the *last* person Nicodemus would expect to enter into the kingdom of God. But by the end of her conversation with Jesus, she's doing just that. She leaves behind her water jug, which represented her old life, so she can unashamedly run back to her antagonists in the village to tell them about what she's found in Jesus. She—this Samaritan woman, the ultimate "other," the ultimate outcast—becomes the very first evangelist.

And because of her, many other Samaritans from her village became followers of Jesus. Think about that. Many of Jesus' very first followers were considered half-breed outcasts by the standards of Jesus' people, the Jews.

And the fact is that whether we're willing to admit it or not, we often have a tendency to look at life and faith kind of like Nicodemus did. We want to define who's in and whose out. We want to judge and sort people into categories. And we have a tendency to welcome those who are like us, and maybe not be as welcoming to those who aren't.

We also have a tendency to wrap ourselves in knots setting up a bunch of rules or propriety and good behavior in an attempt to convince ourselves that if we just follow those rules, we'll be in with God. And, of course, that whoever doesn't follow them is going to be rejected by God.

It all boils down to control. Like Nicodemus, we want to be in control. But we aren't. As Jesus told Nicodemus, the Spirit is like the wind, blowing where it wants. As Jesus told this Samaritan woman, the Spirit is like water, flowing wherever it wants, even into the most unexpected of places.

We can't control God. We can't put God in a box. The air's going to escape. The water is going to seep out. God does not care about our classifications and our rules. God is going to reach out with God's living water to whoever God wants to.

And if God can do it for a Samaritan woman, God can surely do it for you.