

**A Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent
March 8, 2026**



*Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well
Henryk Siemiradzki 1886*

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Woman at the well...

Water... is heavy!

We found that out a couple of weeks ago when our hot water tank died. This was the hot water tank that serviced the kitchen, laundry room and downstairs bath. For a couple of weeks, while the outside temperature was below zero, we hauled water from the utility sink to the stove where we heated the water for cooking, cleaning and laundry.

Fortunately, we brought over our big stainless canning kettles from the Hartville house when we moved. They could hold about five gallons of water but then you had to heft that weight to a heat source if you wanted hot water.

The experience was reminiscent of our time in Kenya. Some of you may remember that when we were there we were in the midst of a drought – so severe that it affected the power grid. With hydro-electric power, if you didn't have water, you couldn't have lights.

We were right on the equator so you would have daylight from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. but I remember doing evening Bible study by gas lamp. Our water was brought to us by truck load, and I can remember world-class scholars coming to our home while we played one-ups-man-ship over dinner on how much we could get done with the least amount of water. My record was one-and-a-half gallons of water. I could shampoo, shower, use conditioner and rinse. Then recapture the water and flush.

Water is what drew the women of Samaria together. They would gather at the well in the morning to draw water from the well to run their households for the rest of the day. That would be water for cooking, cleaning, drinking. They brought urns with them and would fill them to take them back to their homes. Perhaps to make them feel less like beasts of burden, the women would gather in cool of the morning to get their water and perhaps they would visit and catch up on each other's news.

This well takes us all the way back to Genesis. This was Jacob's well on the land he bequeathed to Joseph, his favorite son.

The well would have been hand dug and it was deep – more than 150 feet. With bedrock to dig through, Jacob and his sons would have taken a long time to dig. But here we are – centuries later – and the well is still producing. In fact, it's still producing today. The well would have a bucket, attached to a rope and the rope wound around a hand crank to lower to the water in the well.

Over the centuries, herds and flocks would be led to the well. It would be the shepherd's job to lower the bucket into the well and draw it up to pour into troughs for the animals to drink. When the well was not in use, it would have to be covered so dust, dirt and critters wouldn't contaminate the water in the well.

The women, who had gathered at the well earlier in the day, have gone back to their homes. And here comes another woman in the heat of the day to draw water from the well. She's coming at this time because she is not welcome to come with the other Samaritan women.

Scripture tells us that there is hatred among the Jews and Samaritans. Most Jews avoided even going through Samaria so they would have no dealings with the Samaritans. The background goes back to the time of the Exile. The Assyrian king at that time, King Sargon, repopulated the area with captives from other lands. The intermarriage broke the ancestral line of the Jews. In other words, these foreigners lost their pedigree.

As she approached the well, Jesus spoke to her, "Give me a drink."

The woman immediately assumes he's "not from around here" and doesn't know the social rules. She asks, "How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink from me, a Samaritan woman. For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

Jesus gave a strange answer: "If you knew who it is who says to you 'Give me a drink' you would have asked Him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman looks at the reality of the situation and asks "Where are you going to get that water? You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. (Did I tell you that the well is 150 feet deep?)

The woman may be an outcast, but she knows her history. She asks Jesus, "are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself as well as his sons and livestock?"

Then Jesus describes this “living water.” It “will become a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

“Give me this water,” she pleads, thinking she may not have to haul water up from the well.

Then Jesus says, “Go call your husband and come here.”

Uh Oh. Reality time. She’s got to fess up. “I have no husband,” she admits.

Jesus knows all this. Remember: “From you no secrets are hid.”

He acknowledges her honesty. “You have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband.”

What happens now is impressive – in that *nothing* happens. She doesn’t try to defend herself. She could. She could build a case for herself. Women in that era had very few options. Men could divorce their wives but women couldn’t divorce their husbands. We can gather that she didn’t inherit vast sums in any of her marriages. With so few options, she seems to have chosen to enter into another marriage.

Rather than make excuses for herself, she acknowledges Jesus’s authority: “I see you are a prophet...”

She tells Jesus she knows the “the Messiah is coming and He will tell us all things.” And Jesus does something extraordinary.

He tells her he is the Messiah. She is, in fact, the first person to whom Jesus openly declares, “I AM HE”.

This woman hasn’t had the experience of travelling with Jesus like the disciples. She wasn’t at the wedding in Cana to see the first miracle, but she “gets it.”

While the disciples come back with food for Jesus, she leaves for the city with exciting news. She leaves behind that heavy earthenware jug.

She has forgotten who she is. She is no longer an outcast! Her whole character transitions. The message has overcome the medium! “Look,” she says to anyone who listens, I’ve met a man who told me all the things I’ve ever done. Could this be the Christ? Come and see!” They not only listened to her, but they followed her out of the city. They met Jesus. They believed for themselves.

Because they pleaded with him, he stayed with the Samaritans for two days and taught them. Scripture tells us that many more believed.

Now the woman at the well has a name. It's "Photini" which translates, "The enlightened one." She is enlightened because she was the first to hear from Jesus that He was the Christ. Photini is also credited as being the first evangelist. She heard, she believed, she proclaimed.

The Orthodox Church has elevated Photini to sainthood and have built a church over the site of Jacob's well where Jesus met her. She is considered "equal to the Apostles."

I like to think of Jesus inviting Photini to the head table to sit with other unlikely followers – like the tax collector, all those former fishermen, and the likes of you and me.

I want to end with some people who have come into our lives of late. One is Joe the plumber. It fell to Joe to tell us what the cost was going to be for the new hot water heater. Turns out it was twice the price of the one we put in the old house. And that didn't include the hot water tank. That was just for the go-alongs. The home warranty covered the cost of the hot water tank.

Joe told us that he was a believer and he was trying to save us as much as he could. Now Joe had put his faith on trial. That's a scary thing. The best thing you can do in a case like that – is the best thing you can do. I work with a number of people whose witness is reflected in their work. We like Joe, by the way.

When he came with the big, new hot water tank he brought along John to help him get this big tank down the stairs and into the basement. When they had it installed, we all stood and appreciated their work. Joe apologized for the days we had to heat our own water, and I mentioned that it was part of a learning experience I used while I worked on this message about the woman at the well. I saw John's face brighten as I talked. Then he spoke: "That was no coincidence that Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well."

We were quiet for a sacred moment. So there we were, brothers in the Lord and me. When two or three are gathered...

It was a good day. I think the spirit of Photini was there as well.

Amen