

John 4:1-14 Living Water

Our Lenten Bible Study has focused on the “I Am” sayings in the Gospel of John:

Before Abraham was, I Am

I am the Bread of Life

I am the Light of the World

I am the Door

I am the Good Shepherd

I am the Resurrection and the Life

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

I am the True Vine

In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus has the opportunity to say to the Woman in Samaria, “I am the Living Water,” but he does not say it. Instead he offers to give her Living Water, which is so close in meaning that it could qualify as another, “I am” saying.

The Scene

The scene is this; Jesus had been in Jerusalem for a Passover Feast and had spent some time at the Temple, some much heralded time at the Temple, where he had stirred up some trouble. His opponents had heard that he was gaining disciples faster than anyone else and I guess that meant more trouble, so he went back to Galilee. On his way he went through

Samaria, a place where despised people lived. Tired from his journey, he stopped to rest at a well where he hoped to quench his thirst. There he encountered a woman who had come to draw water. Had things gone as expected, and perhaps as they ought to have gone, they would have ignored one another, thus avoiding any impropriety and whatever other trouble might have resulted from their interaction.

Instead he asked *her* for a drink, which turned out only to be a conversation starter. She responded with surprise that he talked to her at all because Jews and Samaritans were not on speaking terms. We are meant to pay attention and should notice a theme which runs all the way through the bible - the gospel message never sets up barriers between people - it always assaults barriers and crashes them down.

The fact of the conversation, however, is not more striking than the substance of the conversation. Jesus tells her about Living Water, that those who drink it will never thirst again.

Spiritual Things

Besides water there are all kinds of things people need to stay alive; food, clothing and shelter, loving relationships, meaningful work, a sense of purpose and fulfillment. One can easily see the difference

between the more and less physical of these requirements; the more and less imminent. One can only live a few days without water while some go entire lifetimes without fulfillment.

It would be easy to say that the “spiritual” needs are equal to the requirements for love, vocation, and fulfillment, while the physical needs are for food, water, clothing, and shelter. But there is more to it than that. The non-physical needs are like the physical ones in this regard, meeting them must be continuously repeated just like eating and drinking must be repeated or else life comes to be characterized by their lack, and by the hunger for them.

One thinks of professional athletes, for instance, who may experience satisfaction until their playing days are over, but then struggle for a sense of fulfillment; or people who when they retire lose excitement for living because their identity was associated with their vocation.

Jesus is not speaking of a fulfillment and love and meaning that has to be repeated, but a fulfillment and love and meaning that once attained, is permanent. The idea of Living Water implies that some deep inner essence of what it means to be a human being is satisfied through a relationship with Jesus.

Where?

The reaction of the woman is not surprising. Instead of asking Jesus for a drink of this water, she informs him that the well is deep and reminds him that he doesn't have anything to draw water with. And anyway, the fathers drank from that well and died and he must think that he is somehow better than they were if he thinks he can draw water from that well for her so that she will never thirst again. Perhaps she should have simply asked him what he meant and let him explain a little bit further.

It is hard to explain Living Water to someone who is living life superficially, actually it is just hard to explain Living Water because our reaction is to take the image literally:

Food = food for the body

Water = water for the body

Shelter = shelter for the body

Relationships are satisfying in and of themselves as long as maintenance is done care is taken to nurture them.

Activity, vocation; like a doctor's work or a teacher's or and engineer's, is fulfilling as long as it is found to be

helpful or to contribute to making the world a better place.

But the location of the thirst that Living Water quenches is underneath the surface of things, and deep down each one of us knows about that too. If we are honest we will admit that we are searching for it.

Relationships

The best window into the spiritual life is the realm of human relationships in the everyday, run-of-the-mill, “I talk to you, you talk to me” sense. Jesus isn’t actually talking about drinking water at all. He is talking about a relationship with God. To be in a relationship with God *is* to drink the Living Water that Jesus speaks about.

The first act in a relationship is a word spoken. “Will you give me a drink?” is not just a conversation starter, it is a relationship starter. It may not go anywhere, sometimes encounters just happen and then they are finished. And the relationship metaphor is not perfect. The analogy can break down because our relationships are often strained and dysfunctional at best, like the woman with her five husbands and live-in partner. (She must have been a Hollywood actress from the 1930’s - 5 husbands?) Clearly relationships have their down side too. But the realm of human

relating is still the best context to understand the things of God.

In this context, we understand the meaning of forgiveness, love, trust. We know what it means to have a safe place to be ourselves. In the world of family and friends;

We live and die
We love and hate
We laugh and cry
We celebrate and mourn
We give and take
We give commands
We obey and disobey
We sacrifice
Someone else sacrifices for us
We despair and hope

We are offered a relationship with God that strengthens, guides, and nurtures us no matter the circumstances. It is not only a peace that surpasses understanding, but a love and forgiveness and sense of purpose and fulfillment that passes understanding too because it is not tied to circumstances. That is what it means for us to drink Living Water. And it all starts when *Jesus* asks *us* for something to drink.

[Back](#)[Home](#)