

March 8, 2026  
The Third Sunday in Lent, Year A  
Trinity, St. Louis  
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Exodus 17:1-7*

*Psalms 95*

*Romans 5:1-11*

*John 4:5-42*

In the Name of God: the Holy & Undivided Trinity. Amen.

“Give me a drink.” With this abrupt request, we are brought face-to-face with another character in John’s story of Jesus’ road to the Cross. Last week we met Nicodemus, an important Pharisee who came to Jesus in the dead of night.

Today we meet a woman at the well – in broad daylight. Next week, it will be a man born blind. And finally, on the last leg of our journey to Jerusalem, we will encounter Lazarus – already dead for three days by the time Jesus gets to Bethany.

In the story we hear today, Jesus talks longer to the woman at the well than he does to anyone else in all the Gospels – longer than he talks to any of his disciples, to any of his accusers, to any of his own family.

John places this story in the Samaritan city of Sychar (now called Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, about 30 miles north of Jerusalem), and specifically at the Well of Jacob. In Genesis 29, we find the story of Jacob, son of Isaac, coming to this well to drink. The well was used by several flocks, and to prevent one shepherd from drawing the water down, there was a stone cover that was too heavy for any one person to move. But, on the day Jacob saw Rachel approach with her flock, he was smitten, and, in a burst of love, moved the stone away all by himself.

It was to Jacob’s Well that a Samaritan woman comes to draw water in the heat of the day. John doesn’t name her, but in the Eastern Church, she is known as *Photine* “the Luminous One” (from *φως phos*). Jesus, tired and thirsty in the midday heat, confesses his own, very human, need: “Give me a drink.”

At its most basic level, this would have been a shocking exchange: a Jewish man speaking with a woman outside his family, not to mention a woman who was a member of a foreign, often hostile religious group.

Small wonder the apostles are shocked speechless when they come back from town. Jesus was flaunting huge taboos, yet it was typical of how he behaved, reaching out to a woman who was likely shunned by others, in the same way he reaches out to us.

He provides her with the opportunity to reflect on her complicated life. It's essential to note that any implications of immorality are a later reading of her marital history. Jesus is not focused on judgement.

In the course of their conversation, Jesus shows that he knows who she is – warts & husbands & all. And, in revealing herself to him, she comes to understand who Jesus is – not simply a Prophet, but the Messiah. Photine is the first person in John's gospel to whom Jesus makes this revelation, "I am he." Just let that sink in for a moment.

All by itself, that would be a story worth telling. But wait, there's more. The story doesn't stop with her recognizing Jesus as Messiah. The Luminous One doesn't keep it to herself. Even though she has come to draw water in the heat of the day, she leaves her water jar behind, and rushes back to the village, crying "Come and see!" Imagine that – come and see!

Does she wait until she understands all the social and religious ramifications of seeing who Jesus is? No. Does she go off to become a biblical scholar or pursue a seminary degree? No. Does she tell them where they have to worship, what they have to wear, and hand them a pledge card? She does not.

When she sees the Light who is the Messiah, she simply cries to one and all, "Come and see!" And, according to John, they did. Many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. She responds to the call of God to drink of the living water, to become a new creation, to boast about having received reconciliation.

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Later in John's gospel (c. 20), we will hear about another woman, Mary of Magdala. Mary was the first person to see and recognize the Risen Christ, because Jesus called her by her name. Then she ran to tell the others, "I have seen the Lord."

These stories have a lot in common. Each is about a woman who has an intense exchange with Jesus while the better-known apostles are off doing something else, like getting food or hiding.

Both women ask questions of Jesus, and in his response two things happen at the same time. They find themselves fully known *and* they are fully able to see Jesus for who he is. They each ask a question, receive a response, and hit the road with the news.

And what is that news? That news is the message of reconciliation that Paul talks about this morning. That news is that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed One of God, who has died and was raised so that God might reconcile all things to God's self. That news is that, in Christ, God has made all things new. All things. New.

The question is no longer "is God willing to accept you?" The question now is "Can you believe that God knows you, loves you, thirsts for you?"

Reconciliation is not about constantly cramming for some cosmic pop quiz in which God is always asking trick questions. Reconciliation is believing, really believing, and then living fully into, the belief that God loves you enough to have given, in Christ, his very life for you. God's very life. This is the message of reconciliation that Paul calls us to boast about. Yes, boast about!

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I'm willing to wager that each and every one of you in this room has had some sort of experience of being touched by the hand of God, some deep sense of calm or joy in this place, with these people. I think that's why you are here – why you make this place your home.

But, be honest, do you boast about it? "Goodness, me," you're thinking, "he's not really serious is he?" "After all, we're Episcopalians." "We're Midwesterners." "We just don't talk about things like that." "We don't want to tell other people what to do." "We're not trained." "We wouldn't know what to say..."

Remember two women, Mary Magdalene and Photine. They simply heard God's call and responded:

"I have seen the Lord!"

"Come and see!"

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In a few minutes we will sing a hymn text that is new to us, written by a woman poet named Edith Sinclair Downing (1922–2016). [Are we remembering that March is Women's History Month?] The first stanza reads

When, like the woman at the well,  
I lived with broken dreams,  
Christ came to me, good news to tell,  
of ever living streams.

Like Photine we, too, come to the well over and over again, thirsting for so very many things. If we could just land that perfect job, win the lottery, get a smile from the person we love from a distance. In John's story of the woman at the well, Jesus reminds us that Jesus calls us to be in relationship with him. That he needs – us. Kinda crazy, but it's true.

As we move steadily toward Jerusalem and Calvary, can we hear Jesus calling out to us? Asking us for a drink? Longing to be reconciled with us? Every day, if we are paying attention, we can glimpse Jesus in our world, in the faces of those in need. Some of those needs are fundamental to our survival – food and water, clothing, shelter, and medical care.

But that's just scratching the surface. Many of us are splendid at providing *things* to address *needs*, while still shading our eyes from seeing *actual people* who, like Jesus at the well, call out to be in relationship with us.

The need to be treated with simple human dignity has a long drop-down list: to work for a fair wage, to have safe shelter at a fair rent, to be seen and respected as a beloved child of God not in spite of, but because of, the glorious variety in which we were made, to be seen and listened to by our physicians and our neighbors; not to be "fixed" or erased.

And, of course, we all share the need to be free from the whims of narcissistic politicians who can plunge the world into war simply because they "had a feeling" or had their feelings hurt; seemingly without a plan, and without a thought for the cost of human life.

The world around us (and the world within us!) cries out for reconciliation. God yearns to make all things new. So, as you come to receive Holy Communion today, to be nourished for the coming week, I invite you to listen for the voice of the Lord who thirsts for you. As we receive his flesh and blood, Jesus says to each of us, "Give me a drink." How will we respond? Pray God that we might sing with the poet,

Since now I am in grace immersed,  
set free, forgiven, whole,  
I share with those who are athirst  
the wellsprings of my soul.

Dear friends in Christ, come and see! Amen.