

It was early in the 1800s when Leo Tolstoy published his tome, *Anna Karenina*. It centers on the life of the title character, Anna, who is a bit of a tragic one. She's beautiful, intelligent, and magnetic. One who's driven by emotional intensity. She cannot love or live halfway; everything to the max.

Partway through the novel, we meet another central character, Count Alexei Vronsky. He's a wealthy, charming aristocrat, who is handsome and ambitious. He carries the confidence that owns any room he walks into. When Anna and Vronsky meet, there's an immediate attraction, an inherent pull towards one another. It's overwhelming. It consumes many chapters of the book.

But they quickly realize, as they're consumed with one another, that the only problem is their respective relationships with their significant others. Anna is trapped in a passionless marriage, while Vronsky is courting a young woman and is ready to start their life together. But the mutual attraction between the two is so magnetic that it can't be ignored.

Eventually, the passion gives way, and they throw themselves into an affair. They both give up nearly everything they have, their standing, their ambition, their future, everything to satisfy this ache in their soul. Yet it's interesting because right at that moment in which the affair is consummated, Tolstoy writes this about Vronsky.

Vronsky, meanwhile, despite the full realization of what he had desired for so long, was not fully happy. He soon felt that the realization of desire had given him only a grain of the mountain of happiness he had expected. It showed him the eternal error people make in imagining that happiness is the realization of desires. Tolstoy

Tolstoy posits these two moments of where it's everything he seems to have wanted against this hollow emptiness of its realization. What Tolstoy is getting at is the same thing that we all feel at some level. There is a thirst within us that seemingly cannot be quenched. You might be thinking that this is just the musings of a 19th-century Russian novelist. Life has changed. It's different. He didn't understand life as we do today.

Over a century later, after Tolstoy's novel was published, the late David Foster Wallace, another writer, delivered a commencement speech in front of a few hundred graduates at Kenyon College. You may be familiar with this address. Wallace names the same insatiability within the human soul. If you're aware of Wallace, you'll know he has a bit of a tenuous relationship with religion, sometimes in the Catholic stream of the faith, other times he would claim a more atheist posture. He said:

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such

thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you... Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on. Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are the default settings. Wallace

What Tolstoy notes in Vronsky and what Wallace taps into at Kenyon College is essentially what the writer of Ecclesiastes, many centuries before each of them, wrote: that God has placed eternity into our hearts. You and I are driven by a wanting, longing, and desire. It's what gets you out of bed in the morning. It's what you pursue in spending the days of your life. There is something deep within us that aches, that longs to be made whole. Put differently, maybe in the language of this text, we're thirsty creatures, going from one well to the next, trying to find satisfaction.

It reminds me of the wise words of Proverbs 4:23, *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."* Some of the older translations take that line and say, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life."

We're continuing our series through the Gospel of John, and we've been tracking some of these themes from the very beginning, things like light breaking into darkness, things like thirst and baptism and water, and ultimately it culminated in what Josh preached last week, that Jesus changes everything.

Today, we are looking at that thirsting and the way in which we zoom in on one character in which John uses this encounter with this Samaritan woman to writ large the human condition across every single one of us. I invite you into the narrative of this Samaritan woman at the well. Enter into the story and see how Jesus meets this woman where she is and begins to change everything. We're going to do this story in three different acts. The first act will be the shocking welcome, the second,

the deeper wanting, and the third, the world made new. So, with that in mind, let's turn to John chapter 4 with the first act.

The Shocking Welcome

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. John 4:1-3

Last week, we addressed the controversy in the practice of baptism, and so Jesus doesn't want to get caught up in all of that, and so he decides he needs to move the center of his ministry at this point from Judea to Galilee. Palestine is 120 miles from north to south, and it was divided into three distinct sections. At the very south was Judea. That's where Jesus has been thus far. At the very north was Galilee. What remained in the middle was Samaria, hence the sentence, "Now he had to go to Samaria."

But there are some things that we need to understand about the relationship between Judea and Galilee, and Samaria. Judea and Galilee were connected through Judaism, but Samaria had this offshoot of Judaism dating back to the exile. Samaria was hated by those in Judea and Galilee. There was a deep, resonant anger and enemy posture towards the Samaritans. The quickest path from Judea to Galilee was the straight line from south to north and would take about three days to walk.

But the most common path for Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee was to go east across the Jordan River, walk up the eastern side so that they didn't even have to set foot in Samaria, and then walk up and cross over once they got north enough into Galilee. That would have taken about six days. So that gives you a small picture of the vitriol between the two. It'd be like going to San Diego via Chicago or something. It would not make sense, yet that was the common path, an opportunity to not even set foot into the land of Samaria. Jesus had something different in mind.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. vv. 4-6

So right off the bat, John's quote, "Having to go through Samaria," in some ways John is saying Jesus is the light that is piercing the darkness. He is not going to avoid these people for any reason. He just says, "I need to go there, and they are not enemies to me, therefore I will walk right through Samaria." He gets there. He's tired. A three-day walk will do that to you. So he gets to Jacob's Well.

One thing to note is that the well is about a half mile outside of the town of Sychar. It is likely that there was a water source in the town. So as he's walking by, he's staying on the fringes. He's a little bit on the outskirts of town, and yet he goes there to rest.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The

Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) vv. 7-9

It's an interesting question. Jesus was sitting at the well asking for a drink of water. To which she's like, "Do you know who you're talking to? Why would you ask me?" The ancient custom of the time would've been, and we learn something early about Jesus already, that if a man approached a woman publicly, especially a Samaritan woman, she likely would've just fled in embarrassment. She wouldn't have even wanted to give the opportunity for this religious man to talk to her, and yet there's something in Jesus' demeanor in which she feels comfortable.

There's something in this encounter, even from a distance, in which she isn't finding critique, but rather a sense of empathy. But nonetheless, she's confused. "I'm a Samaritan, you're a Jew," and I love that John interjects with this editorial note in parentheses that these two don't go together. Jews and Samaritans do not associate with one another. Jesus is deliberately reaching out across every social, cultural, moral, and religious barrier that could be constructed.

First, she was a Samaritan. She was hated. She was considered the enemy of the Jews. They were dangerous heretics. That was everything the Jews thought of the Samaritans. The average Jew would never have taken anything from the hand of the Samaritan, and if they did, it would've had to go through a long process of ceremonial cleansing. So she is shocked that Jesus is communicating with her,

In verses 27 and 28, when the disciples return, they're just as shocked. They look, and they're like, "Why is he talking to this Samaritan woman?" Yet none of them would ask any questions, which speaks a little bit to the disciples' progress. They're learning to trust Jesus, but nonetheless, she's a Samaritan.

Secondly, she's a woman. This was an ancient patriarchal society. The view of women in that day was that they were beneath men, yet Jesus refused to adhere to those sorts of social customs. Thirdly, she was a moral outcast, which begs the question of why this woman was alone. The common practice of drawing water would have been in a group of women. Why is she there at noon, the hottest part of the day, when that was certainly not the norm? They would've been drawing water early in the morning or late in the evening in the cool of the day.

Lastly, why is she at this well a half mile outside of the city as opposed to the one in the town? This was no easy task. It would've been the collection of water that her house would use for the whole day, washing, drinking, cleaning, everything. So what is this woman doing? She's got quite a story. She's had multiple husbands. The one that she's living with now isn't her husband. It seems pretty clear that she would've been an outcast both socially, morally, and religiously. She's there solely due to her own shame. It's the fact that she does not want to encounter others, and others would not want to encounter her, so she has been isolated, and she isolates herself because of her own life story.

She heads out to get water and encounters Jesus, who looks at her and asks the simple question, "Can you get me a drink of water?" There's

something in that question that infuses dignity into the life of this woman who had been ostracized from her whole community. I'd put it this way: the shocking welcome of Jesus subverts every barrier we can construct. Over and over in the Gospels, you encounter a Jesus who refuses to live by the silly constructs, fences, and boundaries that we create. He subverts all of them. She's a woman, she's a Samaritan, she's a social outcast, she's an enemy, and Jesus says, "None of that matters, you are a child of God." He meets her there.

Commentator Gary Burge says this about this encounter. "Characters such as this woman are mirrors in which to view Jesus from another angle." That's part of the reason the woman stays nameless. John wants us to center our focus not so much on the woman, obviously a central role, but on how Jesus interacts with this woman. It's exposing the very character of Jesus.

We witness the warmth of his sympathy and his welcome. Everything in this culture was saying that he shouldn't have anything to do with her, and yet he moves closer. We witness Jesus as the one who breaks down barriers and social divides that run so deep and are vitriolic between people. He refuses to adhere to them.

There are two ways for us to understand this moment. The first is that we may not carry the sociocultural baggage that this woman had; we may or may not be the social outcast in the same way. But the impulse within us is to think of how God could deal with us. He's God, and we are sinners. So many of us, like this woman, wonder why God would have anything to do with us. But the gift of this text is that we realize all those silly things we construct never prevent us from experiencing the welcome of God. Another commentator, William Barclay, talks about this. He says,

To a Jew, this is an amazing story. Here was the Son of God, tired and weary and thirsty. Here was the holiest of men, listening with understanding to a sorry story. Here was Jesus breaking through the barriers of nationality and Orthodox Jewish custom. Here is the beginning of the universality of the Gospel. Here is God so loving the world, not in theory, but in action. Barclay

This is Jesus doing the thing that Jesus is, the thing that God chose to do. It's the light breaking into the darkness. It's the one coming into the world to invite all who would believe to accept his offer. But there's another way we need to understand this text, not just as the gift of welcome we receive, but the gift of welcome we're called to extend.

This is an offer to embrace that and exemplify it in others. Along with our struggle to accept our own welcome in the presence of Jesus, we often draw the same lines that culturally they did. In other words, we often take the route across the Jordan, around Samaria, and up to Galilee. We exclude, judge, ostracize, are outcasts, and we reject, all in the name of truth.

Here, Jesus provides a framework for us in how to engage with those whom we would deem far from God. We, like Jesus, must lead with relationship. We move closer and in proximity to those we worry about

as being on the outside. Jesus has this invitation for her but never forget that he first begins with the welcome.

For you and me, this challenge means we must engage differently with our coworkers, neighbors, those of a different political party, or different sexual orientation, or those of a different worldview. There is no ideological, social, political, or other difference that negates or severs the task of the Christian to extend welcome. Jesus modeled this for us over and over, and he invites us to do the same, to extend the radical hospitality and welcome of the Gospel. The invitation of Jesus subverts every barrier that we construct. How can Jesus do this? Why would he go so far as to do this?

Deeper Wanting

"Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'" (John 4:10). The reason Jesus extends this welcome is right there in his first response, "If you knew the gift of God." The whole encounter, the whole welcome, the whole invitation is just that, a gift. Gifts categorically cannot be earned or achieved. It is simply something that is offered.

In a few weeks, you're going to see a ceremony in which someone is deemed the World Cup champion, but that is no gift. That is earned through effort and attempt. That is earned through a team constructing and building a life that produces the quality of skill and ability to achieve that. But this is different, because a gift is not based on any of that. Gifts are pure grace.

It is a gift, and that means that it is not given on the basis of anything other than the graciousness of the giver. It's not given on the basis of merit, moral fortitude, intellectual knowledge, class pedigree, racial standing, or gender bias. There is nothing that the gift recipient has done to earn the pure gift of God. Jesus says, "Listen, if you knew the gift of God, you would've just asked, 'Lord, could I receive it? Could I have the living water?'" There was nothing in this woman that deserved the extension of the gift.

In the same way that John juxtaposed this woman with Nicodemus, who seems from our standards to have everything together, and if anyone was to earn it, it would've been Nicodemus. Yet he's on the outside looking in, because he couldn't get past his merit and ability to achieve. This woman is given the same invitation.

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" John 4:11-12

At this point, you're beginning to see a framework of conversation that the attentive reader will see mirrors the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus will make a statement. The statement will be taken in the wrong sense. Here, Jesus is speaking metaphorically of a living water, something that her soul is longing for, and the woman seemingly takes it more literally, looks at Jesus, and says, "Where's your bucket? How can

you draw this living water? You're asking me for water. How could you offer that water?"

So it's misunderstood in the same way that Nicodemus was, like, "How can someone be born when they are old? Are they supposed to crawl into their mother's womb?" Give her the benefit of the doubt as I don't actually think she assumes the living water is from that well, but yet she's posing this question like, "Jesus, what exactly are you talking about? How can you bring living water? You have nothing to even draw with."

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." vv. 13-15

The majority of us don't actually pick up as much on the visceral metaphor of the water, because I've got a cup of water here, and most of us have access to a drinking fountain or a sink or some running water. Very few of us in here have actually been thirsty in the sense that the ancient world would have experienced thirst. In the arid climate of the Middle East, in that desert, it would have been something they were hyper-conscious of all of the time. The thirst was always there, and there was a real danger of dying from thirst.

You realize the majority of your body is made up of water, and so thirst is something you can experience at its depth, where every cell in your body begins to cry out for water. Every portion of you feels that when you get to that level of thirst. So, Jesus uses this visceral metaphor for this woman and says, "Listen, you can come back to this well, but you're going to thirst again."

This is Vronsky and Foster Wallace all over again. It's the "I thought this would bring me happiness. This would satisfy the thirst." Yet it's not there. It's Foster Wallace saying, "Listen, everybody worships. It's just a matter of what you'll worship." Everybody longs. Everybody thirsts. And in short, Jesus says, "Listen, what I have to offer you is living water."

What is meant by living water? Water is connected throughout the scriptures to the role, the life, and the relationship with God. Think of Psalm 42:1-2. *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"* This is really beautiful, but this is a deer that's about to die from thirst. That's actually what's going on in this psalm. Isaiah 44, *"For I will pour water on a thirsty land and streams on the dry ground."* Jeremiah 2, *"My people have committed two sins. They've forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."* Over and over in the scriptures, this image of God as the living water is the very metaphor that Jesus picks up on.

Jesus meets this woman at the well and says, "Listen, what you need is something far deeper than the thirst you feel in your body. You have a soul that is longing to commune with God." It's Ecclesiastes, *"God has*

placed eternity in the hearts of mankind." Jesus comes and says, "Listen, I have something that your soul thirsts for every bit, and even more than your body longs for water, and if you go to any other source, your thirst will only get worse."

The woman had rejected Jesus' deeper meaning. That's why she was caught in this surface level where she's like, "You don't have the bucket." It's the same thing Nicodemus did when trying to dodge the question. They try to dodge the deeper thing. She's bringing all of this baggage that she knows. She's there at noon alone. She's filled with shame, filled with all this grief, and Jesus is like, "I have something that will satisfy that deeper thing." She doesn't want to play that game. She doesn't quite want to go there. So that creates the conditions in which we arrive at verse 16, which, on first reading, feels out of nowhere. But did Jesus really change the subject?

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." John 4:16-18

It feels like an odd twist in the conversation, but I don't think Jesus changes the subject at all. Jesus is intuiting within this woman a deeper need, something that is at the core of her soul, this thirsting in which she's going to a different well over and over, and Jesus gets right to the heart of it. She doesn't lie, but she tells a half-truth: "I don't have a husband." And Jesus is like, "Well, I know that." Says, "Actually, the one you're with isn't your husband, but you've already had five husbands."

There's something in this woman that keeps going to the well. For her, it's male satisfaction, companionship, whatever it is, to satisfy that ache. We don't know the complexity of the story behind her. We don't know if her husbands died. We don't know if they left her, if they divorced her. We don't know the story. And I find it interesting that Jesus is not too interested in it.

We often read this and project it as Jesus confronting her for her sin, but Jesus doesn't mention sin. It isn't that it's not important, but Jesus is saying that this is where her life has manifested, it's produced these things. He's saying that those come from somewhere. There's a deeper sickness in which sin is just the manifestation of that sickness, in which her soul is seeking satisfaction in things that will never satisfy her. Jesus is asking if they can deal with that. If she goes back to that well, she will thirst. But what if there was a different well? What if there was living water in which she could actually satisfy her soul?

One of the things I love about this interaction is that Jesus invites her not to generate faith but to transfer her faith to Jesus. We often think that you just need faith in Jesus. But the reality is, if Jesus is right, which he is, if Tolstoy is right, if Wallace is right, if the writer of Ecclesiastes is right, if the writer of Proverbs is right, if our soul longs and desires and pushes towards things, then it's not about generating desire, it's about transferring desire. For this woman, it was about moving her faith in the men and asking, "What if there was something deeper?"

Here's what we get wrong about desire in the Christian life. We often look down on desire and think, "Ah, the desires are too strong." But may I posit that the desire is not too strong, it's actually far too weak. You're stopping short of the deepest desire. The deepest thing in your soul is the eternity that God has placed within it. We assume we're made just of earth, but you were made both with earth and the Spirit of God. It was blown into you back in Genesis. The dirt of the air and the breath of God. You were created with both earth and heaven, my friends, and therefore, your desire is not too strong; it's too weak. You're stopping short of what will satisfy. You're going to the well over and over, just like this woman.

Maybe it's for a purpose, and you live for your family, your career, some political cause, and you think, "This will give me ultimate meaning and satisfaction in my life." Maybe it's this thirst for pleasure, and so you live for stamps on your passport and different journeys or sexuality or wealth or whatever it is. Or maybe it's the thirst for love, where you want to find companionship in the other, for status or popularity. All of those things are weaker desires than the ultimate desire, which is communion with God.

Beauty fades. People fail you. Wealth is hollow. The stock market is tumultuous. Popularity is limited. But what is infinite is God, and the infinite desire that he has placed within your soul will only be satisfied by an equally matching desire that is also infinite. In Albert Camus' novel, *The Fall*, he writes this about his character, who finally admits the truth about his condition.

Because I longed for eternal life, I went to bed with harlots and drank for nights on end. In the morning, to be sure, my mouth was filled with the bitter taste of the mortal state, but for hours on end I had soared in bliss. Camus

It's his way of saying it was the drive for eternal life that took him to harlots and drink, and there were moments in which it felt like it was transcendent, but every single morning, he woke up with the taste of the mortal state of his soul. It is that desire that drove him to those things. It's the desire, the distorted, disordered loves that drive us to these different wells, trying to satisfy. But that's thinking too little of our desire, not too much. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* makes the argument for God based on desire.

The Christian says that creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly

blessings, and on the other hand, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. Lewis

The problem is not that we desire too much, it's that we desire in the wrong order. We desire the wrong things. It is far too small for us to get caught in all of these vices and sins. My friends, those always leave you hollow. They're the well that the woman kept going back to. Jesus is saying, "Listen, I have water that you can't understand. I have living water."

The deepest wanting of your soul is for eternal life in and with God. That's the invitation that's always been in front of us. It's the invitation that Jesus gives to this woman. Jesus says it will well up in you like a spring of eternal water. We often think of the word eternal, because of our modern conception of it, as in quantitative terms, meaning unending life, which is, in fact, true. Eternal life is that, but it's more nuanced.

In the New Testament, eternal life also means a qualitative type of life. It is an unending life, but a different life. It's the kingdom of God that's been inaugurated now. It's the invitation to experience your eternal life beginning right here and now, and that's the Christian hope, that death just becomes a pass-through to a continuation of your life with God that you experience right now. Jesus says, "Your deepest wanting has always been for an eternal life in and with God."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." John 4:19-26

There's this bit of a diversion, in the same way it was with Nicodemus, in which the woman all of a sudden turns to theological terms and says, "Hey, they have this whole thing between the Samaritans and the Jews, and they have different temples. Where do we actually worship?" There's a whole lot here we can't get into but suffice it to say that a generous read is this woman is saying, "I want this living water. How do I find my way back to God?" Because in the ancient world, that was the way you encountered God, was by going to a temple. So her read is less diversion and a little more like, "Okay, I'm in on this living water thing, but where do I go? How do I do this?"

And the beauty that's right in the text is Jesus says, "Listen, the temples are there," but he says, "A time is coming," or the literal translation would be, "The hour is coming." Every time John uses the term the hour, he's speaking of Jesus' crucifixion. So Jesus says, "Listen, the temples are there, but they're temporary." He says, "A time is coming. The hour is coming and has now come." When he says, "I will destroy those temples. The way you come before God is right here. It's in Jesus."

Which is why she's like, "The Messiah will clear this up when he comes." And Jesus says, "That's exactly right, and I am him. I am the Messiah. I am the way back." It's the same thing that I've been talking about. The deeper wanting inside of you will always, if you push into it, lead you to Jesus, because he is the source of the flowing water. He is the one through whom the living water of eternal life flows.

Here you see one of the most blatant claims of Jesus in which he says, "I am the Messiah." This is an offshoot of the phrase *ego eimi* in Greek, which is a link all the way back to Exodus, in which God says, "I am who I am." This is Jesus saying, "The very person and presence of God is standing in your midst. Here is how you find your way back in right relationship with me." That brings us to act three, where the world is made new. And here you see it radically within this woman.

The World Is Made New

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people. John 4:27-28

A subtle nod that the woman got the message. She no longer needed to draw from that well because she's found the living water. Now, which town did she go back to? The one she's been ostracized from, the one she's been cast out from, the one that she refused to be around everyone, and everyone refused to be around her. That's the town and the people. She runs back to it.

"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him" (vv. 29-30). The culmination of the radical welcome of Jesus is the shock that Jesus would meet this woman where she was and take her shame and turn it into joy. It is nothing short, to use the language of Nicodemus, of rebirth.

She had constructed the whole of her life around avoiding people, staying stuck in her shame and isolation, and the moment she encounters the Christ, Jesus, the source of the living water, she's running up and down the street saying, "Can you believe this guy told me everything about me?" And yet it's no longer filled with shame, it's filled with joy. That, my friends, is what confession and repentance are. It's not the

guilt-ridden thing that we tend to isolate from. It's the freedom to say, "I've met Jesus, and even in all of my failure, he still continues to love me."

He knows everything about this woman and yet loves every corner of her life. And that is a radical transformation. It's her world made new, radically different, and it begins with Jesus encountering and welcoming her, and her being able to say, "Jesus, I want that water. I want the living water. I'm tired of going to these wells." Whatever doubt and shame she carried had been killed by this encounter with Jesus. The exposure to the light has a way of permanently extinguishing the darkness.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." John 4:39-42

Do not miss that this woman was preaching the Gospel through this city, taking it into the streets, using the story and radical transformation of her own life to lead others to Jesus, and it's through her story in which her shame was turned to joy that many begin to listen to the words of Jesus. She led others to the living water. Where she was meant originally to be with a crowd of women drawing water from those wells, she became the one who led people to the well of living water.

I don't know what your thirst is. I don't know what it is that you feel will bring you happiness and bring your ultimate satisfaction. If you're like me, it's usually a mix of things. There's this desire I know in my head for God, but it also gets clouded by these other desires. I'm guessing you're like me, a mix of desires. But could it be that these desires are ultimately pushing you further and closer to Jesus? Maybe you hear the words of Jesus, "Could you draw me some water?" Inviting you in a little bit further.

I've quoted William Barclay earlier, but he wrote this. "We are never safe from the longing for eternity which God has put in man's soul. There is a thirst which only Jesus Christ will satisfy." Church, there is a thirst within you that only Jesus will satisfy. My prayer is that you meet him at that well. My prayer is that you would meet him, draw deep, and drink from the presence and communion with God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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