

We have some very good juicy readings to think about this morning. I'll talk mainly about that gospel reading from St. John. But let me begin by saying that two of our readings feature somebody asking for a drink. In the Old Testament reading from Exodus, the people said to Moses, "Give us water to drink." And then in the gospel, it's Jesus himself who says to the Samaritan woman, "Give me a drink." And as I go out, go on, and pick a few points from that gospel reading, I want to be mindful that we're all thirsty. We all have a spiritual thirst, which we can satisfy in any number of ways. But we're all thirsty and need that thirst to be quenched. The question that I want us to be thinking about today as I speak is, are we quenching that spiritual thirst with the living waters that Jesus is speaking about in this gospel?

If you were here last week, you'll remember that I was talking about Jesus's discussion with Nicodemus who came to Him by night, and John's Gospel goes on in the next chapter with the passage that we're thinking about today, Jesus' conversation with this Samaritan woman. And this conversation is even longer than his long discussion with Nicodemus. In fact, this is the longest conversation that Jesus has with anybody in the gospels, His opponents or His relatives or His disciples. This is the longest recorded discussion.

And it makes for a very interesting comparison with what Jesus was talking about with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was Jewish. This woman is a Samaritan. And there's this longstanding animosity between the Jews and the Samaritan people. Nicodemus was a powerful man. This Samaritan woman is very much a woman on the margins, which is why she's going to the well in the heat of the day, in the middle of the day when there'd be nobody there, because she was hoping to be left alone. To Nicodemus, Jesus offered the promise of new birth. To this Samaritan woman, Jesus offers living water. Nicodemus couldn't quite get what Jesus was saying. If you remember last week we were thinking about when Jesus said to him, "You must be born again." He couldn't understand the mechanics how that would work. Whereas this

Samaritan woman absolutely gets what Jesus is saying and gets excited about the news that she's hearing. Nicodemus fades out of the story. Whereas this Samaritan woman stays very much engaged with Jesus and the story ends with her going to tell other people in her town about Jesus.

So, Jesus's encounter with this Samaritan woman takes place at a well about two miles outside the city of Sychar. And you can imagine what the woman felt when she first saw Jesus. She's lugged her heavy jar, in the heat of the day, in the noonday sun, all the way to the well, hoping to be on her own. And there she sees there's somebody already there. And He's male and it's a Jew. Her heart would've sunk. Maybe she resolved quietly to get some water and then get on her way as quickly as possible. But Jesus didn't let that happen. Wasn't that simple. Jesus takes the initiative and speaks to her. He makes a request. And in doing so, He breaks down all the barriers that there might have been between them. Jesus was male, she was female. He was Jewish, she was a Samaritan. He was a respected religious teacher; she had a rather complex domestic situation.

But Jesus reached out beyond all the things that could have been barriers and broke through them. To use a modern idiom, Jesus looks at her and says, "I see you." And Jesus is still in the business of reaching out and breaking down barriers. If there are barriers between us and God, then it's not God who's put them there. St. Paul writes in that epistle from Romans, "God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We've been justified by His blood." And he goes on, "We were reconciled to God through the death of His son."

Through Jesus Christ we have been reconciled to God. We have been put right. Anything that might have separated us from God has been taken away. God has done all that needs to be done to bring us peace, to bring us into right relationship with God. If there's still something unreconciled between us and God, then it's on our side. Whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God doesn't wait for us to be righteous enough, doesn't wait for us to be

holy enough or good enough. Whilst we were still sinners, He died for us.

God always takes the initiative with us. He always reaches out and makes the first move. The call on us is to respond to that initiative that God has made in Jesus Christ. It's not that we get good enough and then we can start doing business with God. It's the other way around. God has done all that needs to be done to bring us into right relationship with Him. We're called simply to respond to what He has done to us.

And I want to say something about what Jesus offers this woman: living water. It's an unusual image, difficult to describe perhaps. And the way I was thinking about it this week is that I can't put into words what living water is, but I do know what the opposite is. I do know what stagnant water is. I do know where the stagnant water is in my life because I have a strange attraction to it. And I don't know what form it might take for you. It might be an addiction, a relationship, who knows. But we all have those stagnant pools in our life that seem to attract us, that we need to leave behind if we're to drink the living water that Jesus offers each one of us.

Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. I'll provide streams of living water." But how many take up that invitation? Sadly, too few. Let us say with the Samaritan woman, "Jesus, give me this water." The Samaritan woman is so much better able to grasp what Jesus is saying, than Nicodemus from last week, who couldn't move beyond the literal. When Jesus said, "You must be born again," he just couldn't get his head around the mechanics of it. But this woman gets what Jesus is saying. When Jesus says to her, "The water that I will give will become a spring of living water, gushing up to eternal life." She doesn't say, as Nicodemus might have said, "Well, how does that water get inside me?" She understands. She gets what Jesus is saying. "Give me this water," she says.

St. Paul, who wrote so much of the New Testament, knew what it was to have this stream

of living water inside of him. He writes in that lesson from Romans that we just heard, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Jesus talked of gushing, St. Paul talks of pouring, but it's the same image of a living stream of water that God gives to His people. And we're not called to be reservoirs of God's love. We're to be streams. Streams of water that flow through us into the world around us.

And I've got one final observation about this Samaritan woman that I'd like to leave you with. When the Samaritan woman understood that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, we are told this, "She left her water jar and went back to the city." And perhaps we might see that water jar as a metaphor, a metaphor for the things that we need to leave behind if we're to enjoy and taste these streams of living water. There are things, there are places that we look to quench that spiritual thirst that we have, that don't satisfy. Maybe those are the jars we need to leave behind if we're to drink deeply of the living waters that Jesus is talking about.

And one question we might ask ourselves in this Lenten season, which is a time for reflection and self-examination, is what are we being called to leave behind? What things have we tried to quench our spiritual thirst that can be discarded? Because they don't satisfy, they don't slake our thirst. Lent is a time to face up to these questions so that we might be able to pray with the psalmist who writes in Psalm 42, a great prayer that begins like this, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." May that be our prayer too, that we might come to thirst for the streams of living water that Jesus promised to that Samaritan woman all those years ago, and still promises to us today. May we find that we can quench our spiritual thirst by drinking from that same supply. Amen.