**John 4:5-26** March 8, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 2

*John 4:5[Jesus] came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” 8(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 9The 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.)*

*10Jesus 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.” 11“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” 13Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” 15The 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…”*

*19“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” 21Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” 25The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” 26Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**On Leading Horses to Water**

Going south out of a tiny town in Wisconsin called Wonewoc (what a weird name, right?), on the right side of state highway 33 is a gravel pull-off. The pull-off is big enough for two cars, three if you squeeze. Put the car in park, get out of your car, go down 6 or 7 concrete steps, and you will find an artesian well. It was capped long ago, so you will see a three inch steel pipe coming up out of the ground. About two feet up the pipe bends 90°, and then again, to form a downspout, and there it is, a continual flow of water; rain or shine, thirty below zero or a hundred above, wet weather or dry weather; there it is, a full three inch stream of water gushing without ceasing. To a child continually scolded by parents to turn off the water faucet, it is fascinating. It’s a water faucet that God forgot and left on, that can never ever run out of water, that doesn’t run up anybody’s water bill.

A few years back we stopped to see if the spring I had been fascinated with as a child was still running. Yep. They’d had to replace the old metal piping with new plumbing, but it hadn’t run out of water. As we were about to leave, up rolled an SUV with Georgia plates. They opened the back of the SUV and started taking out dozens of one gallon water containers. I drove off, now a middle-aged man, knowing that the well which had fascinated me as a child will still be flowing a hundred years after I’m gone.

Jesus said, ***“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*** That is why you are here this morning. You have experienced the life-giving forgiveness Jesus gives. You have come knowing that in hearing God’s Word, through singing the psalms and spiritual songs, your parched soul will drink deeply and be satisfied. All the failures and wrongs of the past week, deep offenses against our God and acts which have brought disgrace to our Savior , all forgiven. You know that even if every man, woman and child here drink their fill, the reservoir won’t drop an inch. This Water of Life keeps us heavenly-minded, sin-hating and long-suffering. Jesus is the water of life.

I would love to take all of you to Wonewoc, Wisconsin, to hear the unending splashes, to smell the dampness on a hot summer day in the middle of a weeks-long dry spell, to feel the cool water on your face as you drink.

Here’s another thought: Wouldn’t you love to share the Water of Life, what Jesus called ***“a spring of water welling up to eternal life”***?

Jesus wanted that. So he continually brought them to others. While we usually think of Jesus as a Savior (his job, not ours), or miracle worker (we can never do that), or perhaps as a Prophet straight from heaven (we can’t be that either), today Jesus does one thing we all can do. He has a conversation.

Now we have a saying about bringing horses to water that you know well. I want to mostly think about the first part of the saying, *“You can lead a horse to water…”* because that is the work Jesus has given us to do. The part about the horse drinking or not drinking, that isn’t our job. Ours is just to lead them to the water. If we are going to lead a horse to water…

**First, You Have to Go Find the Horse!**

Here’s a question for you: at the end of a long day when things didn’t go exactly to plan and a lot more was demanded of you than usual, what do you want to do? The cell phone rings. Not only do you not answer, you shut the phone off! Or you give your wife the look that says, “Today is not a day to talk about hanging up curtains.” You withdraw to a castle and raise the drawbridge. You find a desert isle and mine the water around it. That’s what I want to do!

***“Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.”*** You might drive the six hours from Chicago and think, “I’m wiped out.” Try *walking* from Shepherdsville. Jesus was tired. He’d had a day.

***“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’”*** Now you have to understand how bad a request that was. First of all, Jews and Samaritans had been at each other’s throats for centuries. Jewish religious authorities had decreed that Samaritans could never be saved; maybe Greeks and Romans, but not Samaritans. (*New Unger’s Bible Dictionary,* 1118). Second, more in an effort to keep women in their place than for the sake of propriety, Jewish men did not converse with women in public, not even their wives (Borchert, 202). So, Jesus had two very good reasons to not to talk to this woman. Add to that, Jesus is just plain tired.

So, if I am sitting on a park bench, seeing someone who I know resents the fact that I happen to be sitting on that park bench, and besides, everyone in society thinks it would be more than a little weird for us to talk to each other anyway, plus I am just dead beat, you know what? That is a conversation I am just not going to have! Why make trouble for myself?

Sure enough! When Jesus said, ***“‘Will you give me a drink?’… The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’”*** He should have known better! Any other Jewish man would have considered her beneath notice, would have pretended she didn’t even exist, and would have avoided her scorn. But not Jesus! He knew what she thought of him, but he had to speak.

If you as a Christian want to lead the horses to the Water of Life, you have to go find the horses. There will always be a hundred reasons to not have that conversation. I will always have something else I need to get done. I can always imagine that people do not want to hear what I have to say (and often I am right!) That doesn’t change that they need the Water of Life!

God may not have called *everyone* to be a street preacher. But he has not called *anyone* to pull up the drawbridge to their spiritual castle. We need to be finding ways to have these conversations. That’s what our Hooray for Heroes booth is about, our VBS and upcoming outreach events. That’s why God has put you in the lives of unbelievers, even in the families of unbelievers: to lead them to the Water, to have those conversations.

**Second,** to lead the horses to water, **You Must Be Patient with the Horses**

So, you ask for a drink from the Samaritan woman and she looks at you with contempt and says, ***“How can you ask me for a drink?”*** If you had bridged culturally acceptable racial and gender divides, and asked a foreign woman in her own back yard for a drink and she said, ***“How can you ask me for a drink?”,*** how many of you would have just dropped it? I know I would have. I would have gone back to minding my own business. Or maybe your style would have been more to trade insult for insult. I don’t know. But to Jesus it was water off his back.

Throughout their conversation, this Samaritan woman continued spitting sparks. She said, ***“Our father Jacob…”*** That was a dig at the Jews who considered Samaritans an inferior race. She’s saying, “We, too, have Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, as our father.” ***“Who gave us [this] well…”*** again, a dig at this arrogant Jew [Jesus] who had no right to talk to her. Listen to her after Jesus says he will give her water welling up to eternal life: ***“Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”*** Her words drip with sarcasm.

Jesus returns no insult for insult. She has gotten “smart” with him, but his desire to share the truth overpowers any temptation to put her in her place.

I need to learn from Jesus what it really means to love someone – in the Biblical sense of that word, to be more concerned about them than myself, to let them get their digs in, their insults, their cross-eyed stares, so that somehow, they might hear the name of their Savior. How quickly we make one attempt and then throw up our hands and say, “Well, I tried!”

The only way that I can have this sort of patient determination is when I remember Jesus’ patience with me and my many sins; and that Jesus has told me to speak.

**Third,** to lead the horses to water  
**You Need to Take the Horses to the Water**

Jesus may have started by talking about a glass of water, but he got around to the important part. He didn’t just talk about the weather. And he didn’t get lost in things that sound religious but aren’t all that important.

She tried to get Jesus to argue about who owned Jacob’s well—Jews or Samaritans. She tried to get Jesus to argue about whether they should be worshiping in Jerusalem or at the Samaritan place, Mt. Gerizim. Jesus kept redirecting her to the stuff that *does* matter. Finally, when she says, ***“I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”*** Jesus simply says, ***“I who speak to you am he.”*** He got to the real issue.

You can get into long discussions with people about all kinds of things from what churches do with their money, to whether we should have prayer in school, and all kinds of generic “god-talk.” But if you have not talked about Jesus the Savior from sin, you have talked about nothing. You have run the horses all over the back forty, but you have not taken them to the life-giving water. Take them to Jesus!

But there is a place that the taking the horses to water comparison fails.

**Finally, Drinking the Water Isn’t the Horse’s Choice**

We can put Jesus in front of people, but they don’t make a decision for Jesus. The relentless focus of Scripture is that salvation is freely won for us by Jesus Christ and ours through nothing but trust: *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Scriptures are equally relentless in telling us that faith is God’s gift to us, not human choice. Here, the Scriptures are clear: *“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you.”* (Mt 13:11); *“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”* (Jn 15:16); et al. It’s God’s work.

When that Water gives life, our reading is a perfect example of what happens. This woman didn’t decide to commit her life to Christ. She didn’t pray to invite Jesus in. She just knew the life-giving truth; the Holy Spirit had won her over. The very next thing after our reading—I probably should have included in your bulletin readings—is this: ***“Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’”*** There was no decision, she simply knew it was true. As she excitedly tells people, can’t you hear the angels in heaven sing? Another sinner who has repented unto eternal life! And another, and another!

Here is one caveat to this event. We can pick apart Jesus’ conversation with this woman and analyze its components. We can say, “This is the way to present the Gospel. Do this and people will believe.” But that’s not exactly true. You know it’s not exactly true because many people didn’t listen to Jesus. Many so whole-heartedly rejected Jesus that they wanted to kill him! It isn’t that Jesus got this conversation at a well in Sychar right, and somehow had it wrong at other times. But this event does teach us the things we need to do to lead people to the wells of living water:

**Go out and find the horses.**

**Be patient with the horses.**

**Lead the horses to the Water.**

**And then let the Holy Spirit do his work.** Amen.