

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Quinquagesima Sunday, February 10, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 510, 507:1-4, 1, 512, 52.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-11, Acts 10:34-43, Luke 8:4-15.

Sermon Text: John 4:4-43.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

After the reign of King Solomon, the son of King David, the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, worshiped the gods of the nations around them, and abandoned the true God. God permitted the ten northern tribes to be ruled by a wicked king named Jeroboam. Because of his covenant, God permitted Rehoboam, son of Solomon, to rule over Judah. Judah, also called Judea, the southern kingdom, was the one tribe that God preserved so that a Savior might be born of the descendants of David. Eventually the northern kingdom became known as Samaria. In 722 B.C. the ten tribes known also as "Israel" were dragged off into slavery and submission by the Assyrian king and became known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. Israel ceased to exist. The land was resettled by foreigners, who intermarried with the people who remained. As a result, the mixed people in Samaria continuously combined false religions with the worship of Jehovah.

The people of Judah were also deported into captivity in Babylon during the years between 605 B. C. and 586 B.C. Then between 538 B.C. and 458 B. C. some were permitted to return to Palestine. A remnant of them did return, so that God could fulfill his promises of the Savior being born of the descendants of King David.

That is the very broad historical background of a situation where Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David and Son of God stopped at a well in Samaria.

It was either noon or 6:00 p.m., depending on whether John is using Jewish time or Roman time. His disciples went into town for some food and he waited at the well and asked a woman who came out of the town for some water to drink. That led to the situation where instead of just receiving a drink of earthly water that will sustain for only a short time,

**JESUS GIVES LIVING WATER, THE WATER OF LIFE**

1. **Jesus reaches out to a foreigner and offers her living water.**
2. **This foreigner is expecting The Messiah.**
3. **Jesus tells her "I who speak to you am he."**

*"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.) 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.'" Samaritans and Jews just didn't get along.*

Jesus knew what he had to offer to mankind, including to this Samaritan woman, someone whose beliefs did not agree with the Scriptures. And in addition, here was a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman to help him. Often women came out in groups to gather water, but this woman was alone, perhaps because she was an outcast from the women of the community because of her immorality. She seems surprised that he is so forward as to ask her for a drink. Jesus uses this as an opportunity to open a conversation about his real mission on earth and what he can do for mankind.

If people only knew what Jesus can offer, they would be asking him every day, just as we do in our prayers. Faith in Jesus gives eternal life and gives us hope and comfort even now. Jesus and his Spirit can be understood to be the **“living water.”** Faith is receiving the water. The water Jesus gives us is **“a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** Life with Jesus becomes a part of our being: fresh, flowing, everlasting.

Jesus speaks of **“living water”**. The term could also be used to describe fresh spring water and that is what the woman is thinking of. The woman didn't understand him. She was thinking only of matters of this world, the deep well in front of her, and the fact that Jesus didn't have a pitcher or bucket and/or the rope necessary to draw water out of this deep well that Jacob, a Jew whom the Samaritans also claimed as an ancestor, had dug. She – perhaps mockingly – asks if he is greater than Jacob! But she wanted to know more. She wanted to know where she could get this living water.

**“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but 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.’”** Jesus uses the picture of water to show what he has that mankind needs. Drinking the water Jesus offers is the idea of believing in Jesus.

But she doesn't understand what he is really talking about, for she asks, **“Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”** Jesus, in his omniscience, makes it clear that he knows more about her than she thinks.

**“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.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’”**

Jesus had been telling the Samaritan woman the saving truth of the Gospel in his discussion of water. But now he spoke law to her. Only when one knows and feels his or her sinfulness can the message of the gospel really be meaningful. Only in this way could she realize the thirst that Jesus quenches forever. When he told her to go get her husband, he effectively showed her sin to her and gave her opportunity to confess and repent. Her short answer opened the door for Jesus. Perhaps she said it with a sense of shame: **“I have no husband.”**

Jesus drove the point home. You have spoken the truth, he emphasized, a truth that encompassed a history of adultery, divorce, fornication: 5 husbands and a live-in!

She recognizes him as a prophet, and proceeds to ask him about something which may have been bothering her. She recognizes that there are differences between her religion and the religion of the Jews, and may have wondered why. So she asks this prophet.

The Samaritans had built their own temple on Mount Gerazim nearby and continued worshiping there even after their temple was destroyed. The Jews, however, worshipped in Jerusalem, where God had told them to build his temple. What was she to do?

Jesus points to true religion, that is, to the true source of salvation. The heart of this sentence is Jesus' words **“salvation is from the Jews.”** The Savior was sent first to the Jews.

He answers her question about where they should worship the true God.

The real answer for New Testament Christians – for all Christians, for all believers, is that we must **“worship the Father in spirit and truth.”** It doesn't matter WHERE you worship, what the surroundings are, whether they are simple or extravagant and luxurious and spectacular. It matters what – that is, whom – you worship. Like many of you, I have worshiped with fellow confessors of Christ in basements, rented rooms, hotel rooms, and even a few places where you wouldn't expect to hold worship services, such as a place that served beer at different times of the week than the time of our worship service– yes, it smelled like a bar.

The PLACE doesn't matter so much as one's heart. Jesus knew that the Romans would destroy the temple in Jerusalem a little more than a generation after he died. But that wouldn't bring an end to true worship. We can worship the heavenly Father anywhere. However, what or whom we worship means everything. True worshipers will worship the Father – the true God – in spirit and in truth, regardless of where we gather. Jesus himself tells us **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** (Matthew 18:20)

**"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."** (KJV) Sometimes we are part of such a small group. In my life I've lead worship services of very large groups and even in a church situation where only one member was present – just the two of us!

Now my personal illustrations aren't really important. What is important is that we realize we don't have to have an elaborate temple or church building to worship in – but our congregations do have very nice buildings in which to worship. The important thing is to worship God in truth. The important thing is that we have the truth of God in our midst, and that we continue in the truth and purity of God's Word. We read in John 8:31: **"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.'" The King James Version reads: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."**

**"The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.'"**

The woman finally catches on – by the power of the Word of God proclaimed to her by Jesus himself – that he is the Messiah.

**"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, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him."** His disciples see that he is busy, and they were surprised at what he was doing – talking to a Samaritan woman! But the woman returns to town and tells others whom she found and invites them to **"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"** She was sure he was the Christ, but who would believe her, with her reputation? So she extends an invitation to "come and see". And that is all that any of us can do. Extend an invitation for others to look into the Holy Scriptures with us.

John jumps to the result of this conversation. **"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.'"**

So we see that what appeared to start out as a random conversation turned into an opportunity for many to come to faith because of the preaching of the Word in their midst. Throughout history we can see that kind of a pattern. The early New Testament believers moved throughout the world and witnessed wherever they went. Many of them were Christian Jews who had been scattered from Judea and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and completely subjugated the Jews. The believers took their Christianity with them. History has many other examples of how believers continued their worship of the true God where they went. Lutheran immigrants to the United States brought their faith with them. People who have been transferred because of their jobs, people going on vacation, and the examples go on and on. But the confessions and worship of believers, their worship of the true God **"in spirit and truth"** drew others to the truth of God's Word. All we do is spread the seed. God makes it grow and bear fruit.

We never know what a casual conversation may lead to. If we are ready and willing to confess Jesus, the Word of God will bear fruit. God himself assures us: **"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."** (Isaiah 55:10-11) Lord, make us all planters of your seed. Amen.