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“Who’s Really the Thirsty One?”

Text: John 4:5-26 (Romans 5:1-8; Exodus 17:1-7)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

She had been chewed up and spit out, the Samaritan woman we met in the Holy Gospel today. And not just once or twice. That would’ve been bad enough. But *five times*. Or maybe she chewed up and spit out those five men who had been her husbands. In either case, you don’t come out of that unaffected. She has scars, deep ones. The man she was now with didn’t trust her, or she didn’t trust him. She wasn’t welcome with the other women - she had to come to the well when the sun was at its highest and hottest and hauling water was the hardest. So even in the middle of the day, it was dark for this woman. The darkness of sin and loneliness. The darkness of love lost and hope gone. The darkness of closing your heart to others, not wanting to be hurt again.

Perhaps you know what that’s like. Being an outsider. Having a handful of hurts and a pocketful of mistakes. Regrets? Yeah, you’ve had a few. And life not turning out quite as you expected. And that thirst you feel? A cup of cold water can’t touch it. It’s much deeper than that. And what hope for the future? What hope for change is there when you lock not only your door but also your heart?

So the Healer comes to her.

They probably hadn’t seen a Jew in those parts for quite some time. At least, not a respectable one. For you see, Jews didn’t go into Samaria - they went *around*. They went a good distance out of their way to make sure they didn’t have to walk a single step among people they considered unclean. So if they were going from Judea to Galilee, they would travel East, cross the Jordan, head North past Samaria, and then cross the Jordan again. And a well-worn path, that. So a Jew there, then? This was unusual. This man was either lost or crazy or up to no good.

But soon she finds out it’s none of the above. Yes, someone greater than Jacob is there. Not just a patriarch. Not just a prophet who *speaks* the Word of God, but the Word of God in the flesh. A Messiah. A Saviour. There for her. To give to her. What she needs. What she is thirsting for.

For this Samaritan woman was thirsting. For love - the men she’d been with weren’t giving it to her. For acceptance - so she’d have someone to talk to besides herself. But most of all *for forgiveness*. You see, that’s why her question about worship, once Jesus tears open the wound of her failed marriages and current promiscuity. *OK! You want to*

go there, Mr. Prophet? Let's go! **Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.** You see, that was more than a question about the current religious controversy of the day, *it was a matter of life and death for her.* Her sin and hurt exposed she wants to know: *Where is God? Where is forgiveness? Where is mercy? Where can I go, Mr. Prophet? Me, who can't even come out to this well with the others, never mind to the Temple in Jerusalem. Where is the life and love and cleansing I so desperately want and need?*

And you can almost imagine the tears in her eyes as she asks. And the smile on Jesus' face as she asks. This is the moment He was working for and waiting for. Now the Healer will heal.

For ***the hour is coming, and is now here,*** Jesus says, when the Temple - the place of forgiveness - will be not a building, but a person. And receiving the gifts of God will not be just in a certain place, but in spirit and in truth. For as Jesus said when He started this conversation: ***If you knew the gift of God, and - not what or where, but - who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.*** Now she was asking! And He was giving. A drink for her parched and thirsty soul. For the gift of God, His place of mercy, the giver of the Spirit, forgiveness, and life, **was sitting right before her.** She didn't have to go to the Temple - the Temple (and its forgiveness) had come to her. For yes, Jesus tells her, I am greater than Jacob. I AM *the Messiah*. I AM *the Christ*. I AM the one who will not only tell you all things but give you all things.

For yes, Jacob may have worked 14 years for his beautiful bride Rachel, and he may have dug this well, but your Jacob, Ms. Samaritan, and our Jacob, did much more and greater than that. He lays down His life for you and me. And He dug not a well with His hands, but a grave, digging all the way to hell and back again, to rescue us and provide living water. The Spirit that will quench your deepest thirst and provide for your deepest need. And He did so not for a beautiful and faithful bride, like Rachel, but rather, as St. Paul told us today: not for beautiful and ***righteous*** and ***good*** people, but ***God showed his love for us in that while we were still ugly - while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Our Jacob came to make the sinner clean. To make the ugly beautiful. To make the outcast His bride.

For that day in Samaria, John tells us, when all this happened, ***it was about the sixth hour.*** That's more than just John telling us what time it was: that's the very same hour when Jesus, hanging on the cross, entered the darkness. It was the sixth hour when the sun stopped giving its light. A darkness even deeper than this Samaritan woman's. The darkness in which Jesus, the giver of living water, said ***"I thirst."*** And the darkness in which finally, when bowing his head in death, Jesus hands over the Spirit. That is the time when Jesus was loaded with the sin and shame of Ms. Samaritan and you and me to take it all away.

And now, as we approach the sixth hour of the day here, Jesus is still giving, still quenching, still forgiving. The water that flowed from the rock in the wilderness and satisfied Israel's thirst just a trickle compared to the living water given by Jesus in the Word of forgiveness He spoke from the cross - and still speaks; just a trickle compared to the water and blood that flowed from His side on the cross, filling every font and every chalice with His forgiveness and life. That what flowed from Him now flow to us. That every sin be forgiven, every hurt be healed, and every need provided.

That's what happened to Ms. Samaritan. For after Jesus has come to her, in the verses right after the ones we heard today, she rushes back to town to gush about her Saviour. Her shame, her hurt, her sin was all gone. She was loved, and she now loved. Not like before, but new. For the living water she had received was now, as Jesus had said, a spring of water, flowing from her.

And so it is now, for you. You are loved, and you now love. The chains of sin and regret and shame that hold you back have been broken by His love and forgiveness and set you free. And so His living water is now a spring of water, flowing from you. To any and all around you whose souls are parched and thirsting - you have the living water they need: the Word and Spirit of truth. To be there for them at those sixth hour of the days. To be there for them who come to wells alone. To be there for them with the love and forgiveness and life that you have received.

And best of all, when the sun comes out again and life gets rough, when the demons return and try to drag all those skeletons out of your closet, when you find yourself hungry and thirsty and tired once again, when the sin in us and around us seem to be getting the upper hand again, when the darkness is threatening to overcome again, your Jacob is here for you, as He promised. Not by chance, but by grace. Your Saviour, your Jesus, comes for you still and is giving still, embracing you with His forgiveness, pledging you His love, and feeding you with His own Body and Blood. For His love for you, His bride, never changes.

Turns out Jesus never did get His drink that day. Did you notice that? But by now you understand: He wasn't really asking for a drink of water. He had much more than that in mind. He thirsted for much more, as He did on the cross - His thirst is for you and me. To make you His bride. To give you His drink. That you know how precious you are, how valuable. That you know the gift of God. So that instead of hanging onto the things of this world and life that we think will give us what we need and quench our thirst, we repent of all that, let go of all that, and cling to Him alone. To Him who clung to the cross. To Him who clings to you in love. For nothing else really matters. Not really. For the things of this world, the people of this world, the admiration and adulation of this world come and go, but the Word of the Lord stands forever. The Word of the Lord made

flesh for you. Your Saviour, who gives you Himself and His living water. Only He can satisfy your thirsty soul, which is the very thing He has come to do.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.