

Lent 2—A
John 4:5-26
Quench Your Thirst

This morning, I want to introduce to you, two people—not made up, but real, live people whom I have met. First, there's Tom. When he found out that I was a pastor, he wanted to talk religion. Tom used to go to a church, but now he doesn't go anywhere. "I'm still a Christian," Tom says. "But I don't really believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven—there's lots of ways—to each his own." That's Tom.

Then there's Amy. Amy has an uncle who's a pastor. Amy describes herself as someone who is "spiritual" but not religious. "But I am a Christian," Amy says. "I believe in God, that there is a God." That's Amy.

Both of them believe that they are Christians. But what really is Christianity? Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ. Christianity focuses on Jesus Christ, and all the things that Jesus Christ said and did. That's Christianity. The first person I mentioned to you, Tom—he's not a follower of Christianity. Tom is making up his own religion—a vague belief in God and other things. That's not Christianity. That's the religion of "Tom-ism." Whatever Tom says, that's what's true.

Amy believes that she's following Christianity, but in reality, she's not. Amy's also making up her own religion as she goes through life, the religion of "Amy-ism." Whatever Amy says, that's what's true.

Many, many Americans are caught in this trap. Believing that you are a Christian, but in reality, you aren't. Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ. What he said. What he did. Many people aren't following Christianity, but the religion of "Me-ism." Whatever is true for me, whatever I make up in my head, that's my religion.

My friends, I'm not up here today to lambaste all those people, because, in many ways, all of us are plagued with "Me-ism"—the religion of me—whatever I like, whatever I think is true, that's what I believe.

What is it like for the soul of a person who is trapped in "Me-ism," or "Tom-ism," or "Amy-ism"? What do you think Tom's soul looks like, as he follows the religion of Tomism? Or how about Amy's soul? Those are souls that are dying, or maybe already dead, from spiritual thirst. A thirsty soul is a soul that wants to learn the truth about God—that wants to worship the true God. A thirsty soul is a soul that wants to have a real relationship with God. Just imagine some of those sad pictures you see, pictures of starving children in Asia and Africa—those poor children who are nothing but skin and bones, barely surviving—some of them barely alive, or not even alive at all. That's what a thirsty soul looks like, a soul that needs God, but instead is given nothing, but Tomism, or Amy-ism, or Me-ism.

This morning, we learn how Jesus can quench a thirsty soul, how he can satisfy your soul. Today we're going to take a look at spiritual thirst. We're also going to take a look at living water.

I. Spiritual thirst

We meet a Samaritan woman today, who had a very thirsty soul. "I believe in God, and that a Messiah is coming. I'm not sure why exactly the Messiah is coming, but I do know that

he'll be some sort of teacher or prophet. But I'm not a very religion person. There's too much arguing between our religious leaders and the Jews over where to worship. The Jews say, "Worship by us!" Our religious leaders say, "No, worship by us!" All that arguing frustrates me, so I stay away from religion."

A thirsty soul! She goes on to say, "I have a pretty bad past. I've been married five times. And now, I'm living with someone. I know that what I do is wrong. I don't need you to tell me that. I'm going out to the well to get some water now. Nobody ever comes with me, because everyone knows about me. I'm an outcast, and I deserve it." Here we see the Samaritan woman—a thirsty soul, looking for satisfaction in life in all the wrong places. She has a vague belief in God, lax morals—very similar to our society today.

"There's a Jewish man at the well. I'll just ignore him. Jews don't like us. And we don't like them. Plus, he's a man." But this stranger surprises her: "*Will you give me a drink?*" (7) he asks. That's strange: "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" The stranger replies: "*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*" (10). Living water? This Jewish stranger talks like a rabbi, a teacher. Living water?

"*Sir, 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 this well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?*" (11-12) This stranger is making me very curious. What is this living water?

The stranger replies: "*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*" (13-14). "Hmmm. I still don't know what he's talking about—living water that you can drink and never be thirsty again? Sounds good to me. "*Sir, give me this water*" (15).

She didn't understand what Jesus was saying. He was talking about the Gospel. She had come to the well for regular water. But what she really needed was something for her soul. Her soul was dying of thirst. She didn't realize it. Jesus wanted her to realize that something was wrong with her soul, and so he said to her: "*Go, call your husband and come back*" (16).

Jesus brings up a sensitive subject, doesn't he? Her personal life was a complete disaster—five marriages and a live-in. Had her sin brought her happiness? Of course not, but consider how she ended up in this situation. She followed what she had thought was going to make her happy. That is the lure of sin. It always promises if I do this, then I will be truly happy. Sin does not bring lasting happiness, but it does bring shame. She thought she could avoid the subject by saying, "I have no husband." Technically, she was right, but Jesus wasn't going to let it rest. "*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*" (17-18). Jesus reveals that he is God here. God knows what's going on in everyone's personal life—Jesus knew that everything was not OK for this woman, that her soul was not right with God. Jesus knew about this woman's past, and present—he wanted to help this woman, to save her, and so he reminded her of her sin.

She was trapped in the false religion of Me-ism: "I believe in God, and whatever is true for me." Her soul was thirsty, and nothing seemed to satisfy her. Jesus points out her five broken marriages, and now her live-in. Can we see ourselves? Are we like that woman? In many ways, we are, aren't we? We have sins in our lives too, things in our past and maybe present that we don't want people to know about. But God knows, and he could bring them up

just as easily as we see Jesus doing here. We look for satisfaction in our lives, but we always seem to be looking in the wrong places. We want something that gives us a sense peace, a sense of fulfillment. We want something that takes away the guilt that comes back to haunt us from time to time. We want something that quenches our soul.

But our sins have poked holes in our souls. And no matter what we pour into our souls, our thirst doesn't go away. We never completely feel that sense of peace and fulfillment. We never really get rid of that guilt. We try to pretend that everything is OK. "That's OK," we say, "I'm happy with my life, even though I don't have a relationship with God." But deep down, we're thirsty. Deep down, we know that we need something. Deep down, we know that after we die, we will have to answer for our sins. Then what? Where can we turn?

II. Living water

This is the season of Lent. Lent is like an oasis in the desert. Lent is that time in the year when your thirsty soul sees Jesus, and receives living water. "Drink this living water," Jesus says, "And you will never be thirsty again." What is that living water? It's a message. And the message is this: God knows that you are sinful. But God is merciful. Instead of punishing us for our sins, he sends his Son, Jesus Christ into the world. To most, Jesus seemed like your typical Jewish man. But he was anything but typical. Jesus was God in the flesh, and he did something special for us. He lived a perfect life for us. And then, he died on a cross. And while he was on that cross, he was punished for our sins. God loves us so much, that instead of God punishing us for our mistakes in life, our sin, he punished Jesus Christ, his Son, instead. God loves us. And because of what Jesus did, God forgives us.

This message is the water of life. When we hear that message, when we hear that our sins have been taken away, that our past has been wiped clean, it's water for the thirsty soul. Our soul hears this message and says, "Thank you! No longer do I feel guilty. God has forgiven me. No longer do I wish that I could feel peace in my heart. No longer do I wish that I could be close to God. Thank you," says our soul. The water of life is the forgiveness of sins. And when our soul drinks that water down, it finally feels satisfied and fulfilled, at peace with God. Instead of a dried-out soul that is dying or dead of thirst, our soul becomes a spring of water, overflowing, welling up to eternal life.

The Samaritan woman continued by asking Jesus some questions that had been bothering her. Where to worship God? Jesus told her that the where is not important. What's important is the how—how you worship God—in "*spirit and in truth*" (23) Jesus said. The first key to true worship is *spirit*—not mere lip service of going through the motions, but a sincere reverence for the Savior. The Lord wants our hearts. Now it's a simple fact that for many, the location is more important than the spirit of worship. We have a beautiful church, which can stir a feeling of reverence just by being in it. That attracts some people, as well as the school and other outward things. If this beautiful building were gone, and replaced by a cement block auditorium, what would that do to our attendance and membership? Is the place of worship most important or the spirit? The word "worship" originally meant falling down on your face before the Lord. Worshipping in spirit means we sincerely and humbly confess our unworthiness before the Lord and look to him for help. Are we worshipping in the spirit every time we come to church? Our greatest danger is to miss the spirit of worship and become mere spectators at a performance. It's oh so easy to go through the motions and mumble our way through.

The second key to true worship is the *truth*. May we never take that precious truth for granted! Having Jesus as our center of worship makes all the difference between just being religious and being saved. This is the message we want to share freely with the whole world. Don't make up things about God that aren't true. Find out the truth about the God who loves you and has saved your soul, and worship him in spirit and in truth.

The woman said, "I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus declared, "*I who speak to you am he*" (26). That woman went to the well that day looking for water. What she found, was so much more—water for her thirsty soul. She found the Messiah, who had come to take away her sins and bring her the water of life. The story concludes with the woman returning to her town and telling everyone about Jesus. Jesus was invited to the town, and many Samaritans put their faith in him. And it all began with Jesus asking a simple question: "*Will you give me a drink?*" (7)

That was Jesus' purpose, his mission, to bring to these people the water of life. That's also the purpose, the mission, of St. John's Lutheran Church. The world is a spiritual desert, filled with people who believe in God, and try to make up the rest. The religion of Tom-ism, or Amy-ism, or Me-ism—whatever is true for me. But that kind of religion doesn't satisfy—doesn't quench the thirsty soul. The purpose of St. John's is to be a well in the community, where we can find the water of life. If we're thirsty, if we're tired of trying to make up a religion that doesn't satisfy, come and hear what God has done for us, how Jesus has taken our sins away and has given us eternal life. If we're already a Christian, keep coming. Because the world is a very dry place spiritually, and the sins we commit make our souls even drier. Come and be refreshed again and again, with the water of life. Here Jesus changes our dry soul into a spring, welling up to eternal life. Here we can invite our loved ones, who need water for their thirsty souls.

It's not a mirage. "*Whoever drinks (earthly) water will be thirsty again,*" Jesus says. "*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*" (13-14). How thankful we are, for Christ, and his living water. Amen.