

The Outcast

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning. I'm Melissa Arsuniega, and I am part of the El Cerrito Kensington Community Group, an Oikos group, and a deacon.

Today's scripture reading is from the book of John, chapter 4, verses 4 through 42, as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the gospel according to John.

Now Jesus had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink?

[1 : 11] His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. 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.

Sir, the woman said, 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 the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?

Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give them will be in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. The 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.

[2 : 27] 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 ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. Woman, Jesus replied, Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, for salvation is from Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.

God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the spirit and in truth. The woman said, I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming.

[3 : 51] When he comes, he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, I am he.

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 Messiah? They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile, his disciples urged him, Rabbi, eat something.

But he said to them, I have food to eat that you know nothing about. Then his disciples said to each other, Could someone have brought him food?

[4 : 50] My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, It's still four months until harvest?

I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. Even now, the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

Thus the saying, One sows and another reaps, is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

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.

[6 : 09] This is the gospel of the Lord. Thank you for that reading. One of the longest probably that we've done in quite a while. And there's so much here that we just need to dive right in.

But a bit of context is needed to appreciate what the first hearers would have understood implicitly about this text. And that is that there are all kinds of reasons why Jesus should not be talking to this woman.

And that's the most striking feature of the story is the radical move that Jesus makes by initiating a conversation with her. And you even notice the shock that she has, right, that Jesus begins speaking with her.

She says in verse 9, 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?

And this conversation is crossing several boundaries. So the first is a racial and a cultural boundary.

[7 : 20] Centuries before this time, most Jews had been exiled from the promised land over to Babylon. Some Jews stayed behind and those who stayed behind, some of them intermarried with Canaanites and Assyrians.

They essentially formed a new tribe. They started a new syncretistic religion. That's the Samaritans. And for first century Jews, Samaritans were the worst kind of outcasts because on the one hand, they were seen to be both racially inferior and on the other hand, theological heretics.

And so for first century Jews, well, there was constant trouble. I mean, constant animosity and conflict between these two groups of people such that Jews rarely did what Jesus does.

They tried to travel around Samaria. They didn't even go through Samaria. When they did go through Samaria, some Samaritans would attack Jewish people. It was a mess. And particularly Jews would not share their eating and their drinking vessels with Samaritans.

But Jesus asked this woman for a drink from her jar. Okay, so he's crossing a racial and a cultural boundary. Secondly, there's a gender and a sex boundary here.

[8 : 46] Jesus is known. His notoriety is rising as a holy man who's calling the nation of Israel back to God.

And in that culture, it was scandalous for any devout Jewish man to allow themselves to be alone with a strange woman, let alone to be in a conversation with her.

The risk of ritual impurity, the risk of gossip, the risk of immorality, they considered way too high. And the disciples understood this. In verse 27, it says that they were startled to find Jesus talking with a woman.

So you've got a racial, cultural boundary, a gender, sex boundary, and you've got, finally, a spiritual and a moral boundary because she comes to draw water at noon.

And this is not the normal time for women to visit a well that's set at some distance from their village or their town. You would normally come early in the morning in the cool of the day or later in the evening when it was not so hot.

[9 : 51] And the question is, why is she here alone right in the middle of the day? And the fact that she's come at a time when she would be least likely to meet anyone who knows about her past or

her lifestyle pretty much tells us everything we need to know, that she's obviously a bad character. Even within her marginalized sector of society, she's considered such so that she doesn't even want to come and rub shoulders with anybody that might want to talk to her. She knows people don't want to spend time talking with her. And yet Jesus somehow knows all this. He knows her status as an outsider.

And when he begins to speak to her, he is deliberately reaching across almost every single barrier that we human beings tend to set up between ourselves.

Racial, cultural, gender, moral barriers. Jesus should have nothing to do with her, but he doesn't really care about all those rules.

[11:00] And she's amazed that he's talking with her. And what happens as a result is really incredible. So I want to look at this under three headings. I want to talk about the living water.

Lots of water today. The living water. I want to talk about the seeking God. And I want to talk about the overflowing woman. The living water, the seeking God, and the overflowing woman.

When we look at this first part about the living water, it's instructive to us that Jesus is the one who initiates the conversation. Jesus is the one who goes first.

He starts with a question. He leads with common humanity and the vulnerability of his thirst. Will you give me a drink, he says. And this is Jesus' playbook for all of his disciple community.

It's just for us to go up to people and say, hi. How you doing? And to connect with people on common ground and our basic sense of need and humanity and to have simple conversations that can become serious conversations and spiritual conversations.

[12:13] And a fascinating feature of this encounter is that though Jesus is open to her and warm toward her, he still confronts her. He's incredibly gentle and artful and even teasing in the way that he does it.

He says in verse 10, 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.

What is Jesus talking about? Well, almost everywhere in the United States we have ready access to good drinking water and most of us know very little about real thirst but if you live in an arid climate right next to the desert, you realize pretty quickly how much of your body is made of water and that to be without water, to be truly profoundly thirsty is to be in total agony right?

But then in that experience to taste living water, fresh water is like the most satisfying experience you could imagine and so Jesus says to her, well you've asked me, I've asked you for a drink but you actually should be asking me for a drink and what sort of thirst quenching drink is Jesus offering?

he says it's living water and that's a regular phrase that people would use in Jesus' world for what we call running water right? Living water is simply a stream or a river as opposed to a well or a pool it's living water is more likely to be fresh, it's more likely to be clean than water that's been sitting around and maybe getting stagnant and so she hears this offer and she says sir in verse 11 you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep where can you get this living water?

[14:13] and this reminds us of last week Nicodemus in John 3 because remember what Jesus said to him Jesus said Nicodemus you must be born again from above by the Holy Spirit and Nicodemus says wait a minute how?

like am I supposed to go back into my mother's womb and be born a second time what are you talking about? and so often Jesus is speaking with a double meaning and people are misunderstanding Jesus because he's talking at a heavenly level and we're listening at an earthly level and going what are you talking about Jesus?

and Jesus of course isn't just talking about physical water still water or moving water Jesus is talking about the new life the new life that's on offer to anyone the living water is an offer of new life to you no matter what your racial or cultural or gender or moral background may be Jesus says I have got something for you something that is as basic and as necessary to you spiritually as water is to you physically it's something without which you will find yourself absolutely lost absolutely unsatisfied totally eventually in agony and misery without it and Jesus is not just telling us that the living water he has to offer is life saving for us but he also reveals that it satisfies us from the inside and this is very important he says in verse 13 he says everyone who drinks this water from this well is going to be thirsty again but those who drink the water that I give them will never thirst indeed the water

I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life and what he's talking about there is he's talking about deep soul satisfaction deep soul contentment that does not depend on anything outside of us and this is important because most people think that what will make them happy what will give them a satisfying life has to do with things outside of us right so if I achieve romantic love if I get admitted into the right college if I attain that degree if I chart a path in this career if I make this much money if I have a family and wonderful children children if I'm connected to this political or social cause that's going to do it for me and if I have that if I get accepted there if I climb that ladder if I get this girl or that guy then I'm going to have what I most basically need and want in life and Jesus says no no there's only one thing that's outside of you that can truly satisfy the thirst that's deep down inside of you and he's saying that none of these things that we just mentioned none of these things are going to last you're going to lose every single one of those things when you die and so what you need is you need something that will transcend time what you need is something that will last into eternity and Jesus says

I have the thing he says I can give you that thing I can put that thing inside of you and it will be an absolute unfathomable satisfaction in the core of your being regardless of your circumstances regardless of what is going on outside of you see Jesus says everybody is looking to quench their thirst everybody is going to try to quench their thirst with something and Jesus says if I'm not that thing then you're eventually going to find yourself in an agonizing spiritual thirst and so back to his words in verse 13 he says everyone who drinks this water is going to be thirsty again but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life now I need to comment here because what does Jesus mean by will never thirst again will never be thirsty again spiritually the Psalms

[18:49] Psalm 42 says as a deer pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you my God my soul thirsts for you my body is longing for you the living God when can I go and meet with God and drink from God Psalm 63 says you God are my God earnestly I seek you I thirst for you my whole being longs for you in a dry and weary and parched land where there is no water when Jesus says those who drink the living water I give them will never thirst again what he means is that we'll no longer hopelessly thirst we'll no longer wonder to ourselves is there any water out there that can quench my thirst see it doesn't mean you'll stop thirsting for God because to be human means to thirst for God and what he means is that you'll thirst for God and you'll come drink his water and he'll satisfy you and then you'll thirst again and you'll come back to him and drink from him and he'll satisfy you and you'll keep drinking from him in the hope that when he finally comes to set up his kingdom you will never ever thirst again does that make sense

Jesus is saying look I promise to give you a spring that will bubble up inside of you and it will not only refresh you it will refresh all the people around you he says in John 7 whoever believes in me as the scripture has said rivers of living water will flow from within them and by this he meant the Holy Spirit you see the free gift the gracious gifts of new life that Jesus brings us by the Holy Spirit is given to those who ask for it Jesus says if you ask me for a drink I will give you that drink and so this woman I don't even think she fully understands who she's talking to I don't think she fully understands what Jesus is offering her but she says in verse 15 sir give me this water give me this water now she says give me this water so I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to this well to draw water she doesn't have a full and mature and strong faith with absolute understanding but all she knows is that this man standing in front of me has something that I don't have and I'm asking him for it and the question is have you asked Jesus for it have you asked him for the living water because it's this simple and small act of turning and trust to Jesus that is the indispensable starting point for understanding right and as we'll see in a moment she begins to drink this living water and all of a sudden she begins bubbling up she begins springing forth she begins overflowing to other people living water we need the living water but then

I want to talk about not just the living water but the seeking God the seeking God and one of the things you need to know in the background of this text is the prophet Jeremiah okay the prophet Jeremiah has a very famous text about water and it's in the opening of his book and he says in Jeremiah 2:13 the Lord says my people have committed two sins they have forsaken me the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns broken cisterns that cannot hold water see Yahweh the Lord is the spring of living water Jeremiah says but the people of God and humanity in general have forsaken the spring of living water they say we don't want to quench our thirst on the living

God we want to go get our needs met somewhere else and so what do we do we dig cisterns cisterns are meant to catch rain right and even the best cisterns even the most well managed cisterns they can grow stagnant they can grow stale and moldy and contaminated and create terrible health outcomes for people if you can drink living water you don't want to drink from a cistern and Jeremiah says the people of God have chosen not the living water they've chosen to dig cisterns for themselves that are broken cisterns that are leaking cisterns that are leaving them dry and thirsty so Jesus loves Jeremiah and when he comes to this woman at the well he's just doing Jeremiah 2 right he's just applying Jeremiah 2 and the broken cisterns theology to her life and he says to her you know your biggest concern is not just that you come here to this well at noon is it it's not just that it's hot or it's inconvenient he says in verse 16 go call your husband and come back she says uh

I don't have a husband and he says yeah you're right you're right when you say you have no husband the fact is you've had five husbands and the man you have now is not your husband what you've just said is quite true man Jesus is kind of awkward right here I mean is he always this way I mean is it just because he's tired and thirsty and it's the middle of the day and it's super hot and he's just kind of being critical and mean and judgmental and condemning Is he just trying to humiliate and shame people wherever he goes?

[25 : 01] No if that were the case Jesus would have never broken all the barriers to even open up the conversation with this woman and all the humble and gentle ways that he has so why is Jesus so suddenly changing the subject from living water to her long and sordid history with men and the answer is he's not changing the subject he's not changing the subject he's saying to her if you want to understand the living water I offer then you've got to first understand how you've been seeking water in your own life how you've been digging broken cisterns in your own life life and Jesus always sees straight into the heart he sees straight into the systems and he understands that life in this whole village is disordered spiritually and morally right and he can see how that disorder is being reflected in this woman's life and in her relationships and how this woman has had a life of one emotional upheaval after another she's had five marriages end in divorce and we don't know any of the details of that we don't know if she was equally sinned against as a sinner in that relationship we don't know her background we don't know her emotional traumas that may have given her a tough time to form lasting bonds and loving attachments in a marriage relationship we just don't know but what we do know is that she seems to be both a sufferer and sinner like we are and

Jesus begins to talk to her and he says you've been trying to get living water through the broken cistern of romantic love and that's not really working out so great is it because there's an eternal thirst that can only be quenched by the living God who's made us for himself and nothing else is going to satisfy you right if you try to put a man or a woman in that God shaped God sized hole in your heart much less five or six men or five or six women it's not going to work and that's not just true with romance and sexuality that's true with money and security it's true with power and success is true with basically any created thing that you would try to dig out a cistern that would hold water for you you see many people at this point many biblical scholars and preachers they say oh okay this woman is feeling convicted for her life and her sins and so she begins to change the subject right verse 19 she says sir

I can see that you're a prophet our ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem she's changing the subject I'm not convinced she's changing the subject because she knows enough to know that when God's word comes to you through a prophet and when that truth of God's word convicts you of your sin what you most need to do is go to a mountain what you most need to do is go to a temple on the mountain what you most need to do is go to the place where God has promised to atone for your sins and what she's saying here I think is where do I go where can I go and get the cleansing and the forgiveness that I need do I go to Mount Zion and Jerusalem do I go to Mount Gerizim and Samaria where do I go and Jesus says that's not the point of my mission the point of my mission is to bring the life of heaven to earth and in my coming it's not so much holy mountains and holy buildings that matter so much anymore those is already said in

John 2 that if you tear down this temple I'll raise it up again in three days and what he's speaking about was his own body right and so Jesus launches in here in verse 21 he says woman believe me a time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem you

Samaritans worship what you do not know we worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and in truth I think that should be capital T truth for they are the kind of worshipers the father seeks God is spirit and his worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth Jesus I think is saying here you don't need to go up on a mountain seeking God because God has already come down seeking you he's searching for you friends do you realize that

God the father is seeking you that the only reason any of us are even here today to worship or to consider worshiping God is that he has been seeking us our whole life long God Jesus says God is seeking us by the Holy Spirit and through the truth that comes through Jesus to bring us into the presence of the father where we might worship him it's not that we sinners who dug out cisterns for ourselves come seeking God and asking him to quench our thirst it's that God the triune God the three in one God is seeking us actively providentially creatively looking for any way he's not a passive God Jesus says he's an active and a living God who's seeking you to come and worship him and he's not just seeking!

[31 : 32] you he's seeking all the people that you know and that you love and that you're praying this is this is this is this is this is this is this is mysterious this is profound this is kind of all your father truth spirit stuff I don't really know what you're talking about right now but when Messiah comes he'll sort it all out and make it clear for us and Jesus just kind of drops the mic and says I the one speaking to you I am he and of course this Messiah when he came down from heaven to earth he came to do a lot more than just explain stuff to us right if you fast forward to the end of this gospel in John 19 the Messiah is there and he's nailed up on a cross and you know what he says on the cross he says I am thirsty I am thirsty!

thirst the spiritual thirst of being cut off from the Father cut off from the spring of living water he's come to take our place he's come to die as a sinner he's come to suffer our thirst and it's because Jesus the Messiah came and bore our cosmic thirst on his cross that he can give to us that spiritual satisfaction of eternal life living water so friends if the Messiah stepped out of eternity and into time to seek out this one thirsty woman at the well do you think he'll do anything less than what he's doing here to seek you to seek the people that you love he's a seeking God all right I've got one last thing to say about not just the living water and the seeking

God but I just want to show you this overflowing woman and what happens to her just quickly it says in verse 28 that then leaving her water jar the woman went back to the town and she said to the people come see a man who told me everything I ever did could this be the Messiah and they came out of the town and made their way toward him it's an incredible phenomenon right because she's literally just heard the gospel and she turns around within the hour and starts sharing the gospel and notice that she's just got this water this spring of living water that's just welling up inside of her like when you drink the water it starts flowing out of you it just starts gushing forth and spilling and overflowing into all the other people in your life and they start to come and get their thirst satisfied they start coming to

Jesus to see for!!! Notice how she makes this invitation it's so simple she just says to her friends in her village she says come and see just come with me and see just trust me come and see and then the second thing she says she is just engagingly honest and real she says come see a man who told me everything I ever did he knows the worst stuff about me he knows all the ways I tried to quench my thirst and he still wanted to be in a relationship with me and then she says she puts Jesus at the center she says to her friends he's not just a man he's not just a Jew he's not just a prophet she provocatively says you think he could be the Messiah what do you think it's incredibly warm and winsome witness of this woman is a model for all time for all of Jesus disciple community right it says in verse 39 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 him and he stayed two days and because of his words many more became believers and they said to the woman we no longer believe just because of what you said now we've heard for ourselves we know that this man really is the savior of the world could it be that the living water the seeking God the Messiah the savior of the world wants to not just use this woman but he wants to use you wants to use your testimony he wants to use your life to say to other people come and see with me we're going to be launching our alpha course this next

[36 : 45] Thursday night this Thursday night at 630 and we're going to say more at the end of this service about that but I just want to ask you right now is there one! in your village one person in your life that God has intentionally put there the seeking God who's not only seeking you he's seeking them is there one person to which you need to go out this week and say come and see come with me to coffee come sit the table and come to come to alpha whatever it is come and see and I believe if we trust God like this woman trusted God we will be overflowing with the living water for other people to be satisfied in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen Amen