

"Thirsty?"  
John 4:5-42  
2/24/08  
Brentwood First Presbyterian  
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Scene 1

When Julius Caesar returned victoriously from Gaul to Rome, he wrote his account. He wrote: I came, I saw, I conquered. Today we read a very different account of Jesus' return from Judea to Galilee. I think the writer of the Gospel of John had Caesar's account of his war in Gaul in his hand. Because today's Gospel is in fact a parody of Julius Caesar's account.

Jesus came.  
He was tired.  
He sat.

You see, Jesus is neither Casper the Friendly Ghost, nor God the distant stern emperor. Neither a ghost, nor the Terminator. No. Jesus is not distant, but down here among us. Jesus is God, but wrapped in human flesh. And half way through a 120 mile walk from Judea to Galilee, he is thirsty. Halfway through almost 5 marathons, he stops at a well. A well in that land of half-breeds, Samaria.

He came, he was tired, he sat.

Have you been thirsty recently? Sometimes you and I desperately need refreshment. Like the physical water in the desert at Meribah. Like the coffee and juice after worship today. And sometimes we need the refreshment provided only by God's Holy Spirit. The refreshment we get from singing hymns, prayer, and from Bible study. The refreshment we get symbolically from the Lord's Supper. The Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

But today's Gospel tells us that relief of physical and spiritual thirst is not just by, or for, Jesus' male disciples.

Scene 2

Jesus said, "Give me a drink."  
She said, "You are asking me?"

The person at the well is a woman. No self-respecting man, let alone a rabbi, would speak to an unaccompanied, unchaperoned, strange woman in public. It would make him impure according to Leviticus law. And yet, he said, "Give me a

drink.” And this woman is a Samaritan half-breed. An untouchable according to Leviticus law. Yet he said, “Give me a drink.” And this woman worships God in the wrong place, not in Jerusalem. Yet he said to her, “Give me a drink.” And this woman has had 5 husbands, and the man she is living with now is not her husband. Yet he said, “Give me a drink.”

She said, “You are asking me?”

Becca Stevens, a local Episcopalian priest, tells the story of a fellow female Episcopalian priest. Her friend’s father was also a priest, and told his daughter that the church would tumble to the ground if a woman was ever ordained. 29 years after his death, his grandson, the female Episcopalian priest’s son, was encouraged by his parents to go to seminary to study to be a minister. What he said next brought the house down, if not the church. The 10 year old told his mother the Episcopalian priest, that being a minister is women’s work! Someday soon, we might even hear a 10 year old boy say the same thing about another job. The job of President of the United States!

You see, Jesus breaks down barriers, that is, the walls of hostility which divide us. In the topsy turvy world of the Gospel, women are ministers to men, not just men to women. But if we are thinking only about ministering to physical thirst in today’s message, we have missed the bucket.

### Scene 3

Jesus said, “I give you living water.”

She said, “But you have no bucket.”

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water I give will never be thirsty. It will be to them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

We are thirsty creatures. We can only live three days without water. Fewer than 3 days if we are walking or running the equivalent of 5 marathons like Jesus was. Jesus was not carrying a foldable goatskin bucket like most travelers in his day carry. Like Blanche in “A streetcar named desire,” he depends on the kindness of strangers. He has no need for such encumbrances.

And then Jesus blows her away. He tells her the water he offers does not require a physical bucket. For he offers her the water of God’s Holy Spirit.

We are thirsty creatures. We are thirsty for God’s inspiring and comforting Spirit. Without God’s Spirit we are directionless and cannot be comforted. Prayer, Bible study, singing hymns, and the Lord’s Supper tap into that living water of God’s Spirit, which then gushes up and out into eternal life, that is, the life abundant.

### Conclusion

God's Spirit calls us to move beyond the refreshment offered by coffee and juice. Into the refreshment offered by hymn singing, prayer, and yes, even Bible study. God calls us to break down the walls of hostility between us. Yes, God's Spirit, our living water, softens and enables us to shed our hard crabby shells, so we can go from being hard shell crabs to being vulnerable soft shells. How vulnerable? Vulnerable enough to hug and kiss one another during the passing of the peace. Vulnerable enough to go to Bible study this morning after our coffee time, and voice your personal feelings and interpretations to each other. Vulnerable enough to ask a visitor for lunch after Bible study or worship today. Vulnerable enough to visit Bob Shelhart at Williamson Medical Center hospital today and pray for his health. Vulnerable enough to visit Mary and Scott one day this week and pray for their courage and comfort. Yes, vulnerable enough to partner with a church today. Maybe even this church. Vulnerable enough to go to Guatemala with one of our Presbytery's mission groups this year in April, June, or with Stella and me in November, proclaiming the good news of God's love to all the world. Or at least assist these trips financially. Or give to the Presbyterian Student Fellowship, so they can go. Yes, God's Spirit softens us so we are vulnerable enough to love and enjoy God forever.

You might feel that your bucket still has at least a little water in it still, or that the inside of your bucket is at least moist. You may feel that you do not need to dip your bucket into Jacob's well. Or into the waters of God's Holy Spirit. But if your bucket is dry, Jesus is waiting for you. Waiting at the well.

My friends, if you feel Jesus is tugging at your heart today, and you wish to join with the ministry and mission of Jesus in this church, please see me after worship today.

All Glory be to God, and all God's children say ...