

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
8 March 2026
Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42

“All Is ...Well”

Jesus has no business doing this. Jewish men of his day did not speak with women in public, not even their own wives, nor did they worship or study with them. There was even a prayer of thanks in the morning rite for the blessing of *not* have been born female.

Interacting with Samaritans was off-limits, too. Despite a shared ancestry, Samaritans were despised, considered impure and of “wrong worship.” Travelers would often choose a long detour rather than to set foot upon an inch of Samaritan territory.

So, Jesus is again breaking a long-held practice of his culture. In fact, by initiating a conversation with a Samaritan woman, he is breaking two at once, and may even be three for three, in that she may well have been an outsider even among her own people. Women typically came to the well in the cool of morning to draw water and keep company, but she is alone, in the noonday heat, seemingly unwelcome in their circle.

The Gospel does not even grant her the respect of a name.

She clearly has some pluck, however. When this stranger, Jesus, instructs her, *Give me a drink*, she replies, *You don't even have a bucket, and this well is deep*. Whether you hear this as simple observation or as sarcasm on her part, their ensuing conversation is the longest recorded dialogue between Jesus and any other person.

In merely *speaking* with this woman, much less engaging her in conversation, Jesus is making a powerful statement – that she may be alone and prey to the judgment of others, but personal history, ethnicity, religion, social status, and gender are not matter.

What *does* matter is that even in those who society declares no one, Jesus sees *everyone*...

...as he speaks to her of thirst – not a passing physical thirst, but a lifelong spiritual thirst which can only be quenched by *living* water – by the abundant, bottomless well of God's mercy, justice, and love.

The Samaritan woman has insight. She recognizes her condition and she knows her need:

Sir, give me that water...that I might never thirst again.

That may be the one way in which she is *not* alone in the world...because *we* need to recognize our need for it, too.

So, who is the woman at the well for you? Just as Jesus would have been taught to avoid Samaritans, we all have those we have been taught to avoid, perhaps fear, or deign as somehow beneath us – a territory, as it were, that we prefer to detour around rather than to engage directly or support publicly.

But Jesus moves beyond the biases of his cultural heritage and chooses instead the path of his *spiritual* heritage – the conviction that we are one body *not* defined by biology, culture, or the fortunes of status, but by the common bonds of our humanity – equally valued and equally in need of the redemption and renewal that comes only from living water, the unending well of divine love, justice, and mercy.

There is a reason this story immediately follows the account of Nicodemus – that respected citizen and teacher who comes to Jesus by night and leaves without a full understanding or commitment. Even his inner circle of chosen disciples fails to grasp his meaning about the spiritual food he offers.

In vivid contrast, this unnamed, foreign woman encounters him in the light of noonday, takes in his truth, and realizes his wisdom. Maybe that is why, as the story ends, she leaves her bucket behind: Unlike the so-called “insiders”, she has moved past the literal, now rushing off to share her experience of hope with anyone who will listen.

She is forever changed – enlightened by the promise of a God whose kinship is not reserved for those who look, live, and worship a certain way, but for *anyone* willing to acknowledge their spiritual thirst and travel new ground in their thinking and being.

Of course, exploring such new territory is never easy. Our long-established cultural and familial patterns of thinking, our attitudes, prejudices, and judgments, our courage and cowardice in choices – that terrain is often far more challenging than anything found on a map. It is more akin to what is seen in a mirror...and much harder to confront.

But that very kind of self-reflection is one of the demands and gifts of a Holy Lent.

Faced with the mirror of her own history and choices, the woman at the well does not rationalize or justify herself. She does not deny responsibility or lay blame for her circumstances. Instead, she recognizes her human frailty, confesses her spiritual thirst, and dare to trust in an outrageous promise – that the living water of divine love is poured out for everyone, without fear or favor, even for the likes of *her*.

And despite our privilege and capacity to provide so much for ourselves, that life-giving water of divine promise is the only thing that will quench *our* deep spiritual thirst, too.

If only we would dare to follow the example of a woman we would very likely judge or ignore if we passed her on the street today. If only *we* would say,

Lord, give us that water...that we might never thirst again.

And then, immediately and repeatedly, each of us in our own way, do as she did: Drop our buckets of literal understanding, and by our every word, prayer, and choice, proclaim God’s love and mercy to anyone who will listen, throughout the entire terrain of this frightfully divided, often violent, power driven, and desperately thirsty world.

Amen.