

“THE WELL’S RUN DRY”

John 4:5-30 March 8, 2026

If I said the names, Rue McClanahan, Billy Bob Thornton, Gary Oldman, David Foster, Rita Hayworth, Kenny Rogers, Joan Collins, George Foreman, James Cameron, Martin Scorsese, and Nicolas Cage you would probably recognize these as famous people, even **George and his burger grill**. However, what you may not know is all of these people are in the club 5, that is they have been married 5 times, and in some cases divorced, 5 times.

Of course this group has nothing on Larry King, Lana Turner, Micky Rooney and Elizabeth Taylor who were each married 8 times. You would think no one could get married more than that and you would be wrong. At the top of the famous most married list is **Zsa Zsa Gabor and Jennifer O’Neill** who were each married a total of 9 times. That’s a lot of marriages! However, according to the **Guinness World Record Book**, the woman who holds the title for most marriages goes to **Linda Wolfe** who said “I do” a whopping 23 times.

No judgment here, but I’m wondering, who has the time to fall in love and get married 9 times, let alone 23? I don’t even want to imagine all the legal paperwork. I wonder if they just liked weddings but not marriages, or as Mickey Rooney once said, **“Weddings, I’ve been to a lot of them.”**

In our scripture lesson we find a Samaritan woman who is a **club 5** member, with a live in man. And I bring her marital status up because if that is the part of the story we focus on, and let’s face it, we do like juicy gossip, we are going to miss the most important parts of the story.

Just a side note, we are never told why she went through 5 husbands. They could have died. Plagues, war, or a burst appendix would do it. A husband could have divorced her. Remember a woman could not get a divorce because women had no

legal rights. If there was a moral issue, she would have been stoned to death. She is a woman who has had a difficult life, been misunderstood, trapped in circumstances beyond her control. Given the superstitious nature of people, she was probably considered bad luck and best to be avoided, hence her presence at a well a half a mile out of town in the middle of the day. By now, the woman was done with marriage, but living with a man provided financial security. We shall see, there is more to her than meets the eye.

I. **SURPRISE PARTY**

Five years ago my mother turned 80. My sister organized a surprise birthday party in a park with a lake near the home where her son lived. People brought food, blew up balloons, decorated picnic tables, and brought gifts. When the big moment arrived, they brought mom down from the house on a golf cart and the gathered family all yelled, “**Surprise! Happy Birthday!**”

This story from John is full of surprises. It follows this pattern of question, statement and surprise throughout. The biggest surprise, other than Jesus revealing himself to be the Messiah, is that almost everything said was counter cultural. Jesus offered this Samaritan woman an alternate way of viewing life, a dimension of the spirit. To her credit, she embraced it. And the question is, are we willing to see and live in this kingdom view of reality?

II. **I’M THIRSTY**

Our story begins with Jesus and his disciples traveling north to Galilee. The quickest way to get there is through the land of Samaria, which most Jews would avoid due to century long prejudices. They stop at a fork in the road about a half mile outside of the Samaritan city of Sychar. Located at this fork is Jacob’s Well. Here Jesus sits in the heat of the day. The disciples go into the city to buy food, leaving

Jesus alone. The first surprise is John tells us Jesus is tired and apparently thirsty. We focus so much on the Risen Christ sometimes we forget Jesus was human and his needs were just as present as ours. **Problem**, **Jacob's Well** is 100 feet deep so the only option the thirsty Jesus has is to ask a Samaritan woman who is there drawing water. **“Give me a drink”**.

The woman is surprised – a man is talking to me in public. A Jewish man is talking to me. **Interestingly, the woman doesn't ignore Jesus or run away**. Instead, she talks back. Understand that Jews considered Samaritans to be unclean half breeds. Jews would never touch an object that a Samaritan used, and in this case drink from a waterskin. That's how much hate and prejudice there was between them. Just remember the prejudice in our own country with people of color insisting on separation on buses, restaurants, blood donations, drinking fountains, swimming pools, and restrooms.

This woman replies, **“How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”** **Translation** – You're breaking the rules buddy! But Jesus is not living according to the rules, at least not ones based on hatred and prejudice. His Kingdom not only ignores these cultural rules but plows through them.

Jesus responds, **“If you knew the gift of God and 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.”** By the way, living waters literally means **“flowing stream or spring water”** as opposed to the stagnant cistern water of a well. It tasted better and was fresher. But in typical Jesus fashion, Jesus is not talking about an actual river. He gets theological. He is referring to God as the river of life.

The woman is surprised and she misses his meaning. She is looking around for the source of this stream water and only sees the well and it is very deep and besides

that Jesus didn't bring a rope and water skin to get anything out of the well. She is mocking Jesus a bit, partly because she receives his message literally and he is speaking spiritually. **But again she doesn't leave and stays engaged in the conversation.** Why? Perhaps she is intrigued. Perhaps she is not used to people conversing with her. Perhaps Jesus is stirring up something in her soul.

Jesus goes deeper. **“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”**

The woman replies, **“Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”** She still doesn't quite understand **OR** maybe she does. Jesus is asking, **“Are you thirsty for God? Are you prepared to drink deeply and have your deepest need filled? Are you prepared to live in my new reality?”** The Samaritan woman might be mocking Jesus as if to say, so if you got this living water prove it. But that doesn't seem to be the tone here. I think there is a spark of faith because she cautiously asks, believing, hoping, Jesus can provide this living water. Yet so many men have let her down. Could this one be different or am I going to be disappointed once again?

III. MY PAIN

As if reading her mind, Jesus speaks into her pain. **“Go call your husband.”** I can't, I have no husband. Jesus said, **“What you say is true, for you have had five husbands and are living with one who is not your husband.”** I don't think Jesus said this to hurt her or condemn her, but to bring to light what troubled her most so that it might be healed. He revealed he knows her need, respects her and values her.

Often our pain points are what keep us from faith and make it difficult for us to trust God. We hide under layers of resentment and hurt, sometimes for years. It is only as we bring them to light under the love and compassion of Christ that we begin to heal. **She is revealed but, notice the Samaritan woman is not offended and continues the conversation.** She perceives; there is something more to this thirsty man. Somehow, he knows me even though we have never met. She asks, **“Could you be a prophet?”**

Then she launches into a topic that seems out of the blue for us. **“Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”**

Jesus is inviting her to come to be healed and come closer to God, and she reveals another cultural pain point that is getting in the way. When the Jews returned from exiled, the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the temple and their offer was rejected, which was a great insult. So, the Samaritans built their own temple and worshipped there.

And Jesus responds with the **most shocking, counter cultural heresy of all**, at least for his time period, **“Woman, believe me, the hours is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”**

Remember the Temple in Jerusalem was considered to be the holiest of places, the center of the Jewish faith. Jesus basically tells this woman worship has nothing to do with buildings. O we don't want to hear that. We like our building, we spend lots of money on our building, we have wonderful memories here in our building. Relax! Jesus is not telling us to tear down the church buildings. But in the kingdom

he brings, worship is not about a place. It is about the place God has in our minds and hearts. If the heart is not right, if the spirit of God has no place in it, if we bury ourselves in lies and prejudices, then it doesn't matter where we go to church because we cannot truly worship.

IV. MY WITNESS

Finally, the Samaritan woman puts two and two together and asks the probing faith question as a statement. **“I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”** Jesus said to her, **“I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”**

Then the woman left her water jar, just like the disciples left their nets, and went back to the city. She said to the people, Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he? They left the city and were on their way to him.

So what are we to make of this story?

I don't know about all of you, but I like this Samaritan Woman, five husbands or not. She's smart, honest, has a sense of humor, and brave. Against all social convention and common sense she remains engaged in a difficult conversation that she could have avoided. And upon learning who Jesus was, the first thing she thought to do was rush back to town, the town that probably tolerated her at best, and she tells them the good news and invites them to see for themselves. She thought of others and not just herself. Maybe she was overly excited, but I think that was pretty generous of her. What an amazing person of faith!

Secondly, we are given a picture of the Kingdom Jesus brought into the world. At the heart of that kingdom we discover this radical inclusiveness that Jesus calls us to embrace. In this story alone Jesus breaks through the barriers of gender, nationality,

pain, religious practice, social convention, all for the sake of bringing **living water** to a thirsty woman.

Does our picture of the kingdom need some adjustments? What length are we willing to go and what barriers are we willing to break through for the sake of Jesus Christ, that another would know the spirit that gushes inside us? What barriers are keeping people from seeing the kingdom of God? Are we willing to love people enough to sit with them through their pain?

Lastly, Lent is a great time to ask, “**Are you thirsty?**” Is your soul feeling dry and lifeless? Are you stuck in the past? The good news is the Messiah is here and he invites to stop drinking the stagnant water of our doubts and hurts, and instead jump in the stream of his living water. It is freely offered. In the river of God our souls will be renewed.

Brian Wren wrote a hymn, “**I Have No Bucket and the Well Is Deep,**” that captures the spiritual longing of the woman at the well. It includes these stanzas:

I have no bucket, and the well is deep.

My thirst is endless, and my throat is dry.

**I ask you, stranger, silent at my side,
can words refresh my longings if you speak?**

I have no bucket, and the well is deep.

**Can love unbar the strongrooms of the mind
and scour the tombs and warrens underground**

**for toys and treasures lost, or never found,
for all I cannot name, yet ache to find?**

I have no bucket, and the well is deep.

In the end, the woman rejoices that this stranger is “the path, the gateway and the guide, the keys, the living water, and the light.” Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Second Scripture Lesson

John 4:5-30

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and 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."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,'

18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.