

Have you ever been really thirsty? I mean so parched that you could hardly swallow, much less speak another word? A week or so ago, I was that thirsty and, as I was over near the Walmart in Middletown, I thought to myself – I think I've just got to swing by Chick-fil-a because I'd sure love to get my favorite drink, which is their diet lemonade. And wouldn't you know that when I turned into their parking lot, it was as if they were waiting for me and there was no one else waiting in line. And that lemonade sure quenched my thirst.

Most of us can identify with being physically thirsty or hungry; but let me push you a bit farther to reflect on times when you feel like something is missing from your life, or when you feel that life is okay but you're not truly and deeply satisfied with how your life is going. There just seems to be something missing.

As human beings, we tend to look for this fulfillment in a variety of places – in our families, in our jobs, in our relationships, in our leisure activities. Sometimes we think we'll be truly happy and complete when we reach a certain amount of income. But I've been alive long enough to know, that even when you reach that place, either you still don't think you have enough or something else has come along that is the desire of your heart and you long for that.

Maybe you've looked for fulfillment or satisfaction to your career in your marriage or in having a lot of material possessions. But is that true satisfaction? I can't help but think of the old familiar song by the Rolling Stones – *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*.

Granted, maybe I'm exaggerating my point because I believe a certain amount of satisfaction can come with doing well in particular areas of life. But is it true and lasting satisfaction? I'm talking about deep and abiding fulfillment where you feel like all is right with you and the world – where you believe you are living out the purpose for which you were created. St. Augustine said that there is place within each of us and nothing but God can fill it. And I believe he's right.

We're all looking for something to fulfill us – to complete us. We seek for renewal and refreshment when we feel burned out and exhausted. And you know what? Jesus Christ understands that.

In our lesson today we see a tired and weary Jesus sitting beside a well, asking for a drink of water. This Jesus is very human. He is a tired traveler asking for refreshment after hurriedly exiting Jerusalem due to the fury of the opposition there against him. His disciples had gone to the town of Sychar in Samaria for food when our Lord met another lone visitor to the well known as Jacob's well.

This Samaritan woman came to the well without friends, at an hour when most of the other women of the town would not have been present there. Perhaps she was alone because her reputation was questionable – going through five husbands and now living with another.

Jesus asked her for a drink of water and she was surprised that he would speak to her at all because relations between Jews and Samaritans were generally hostile. In addition, Jesus was a man who was a learned rabbi and she was a Samaritan woman of dubious character. And Jesus replied in a cryptic way, telling her of a "living water" which does not give out – that he had and wanted to share with her.

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. For him, these differences between them made no difference. He was addressing another human being – one of God's creations – and he let her know that he knew all there was to know about her, and he loved her in spite of herself.

None of us should fault the woman for being at a loss at hearing such words. She had no understanding of what Jesus was offering so his words and her responses kept going back and forth rather cryptically. Until, that is, she must have glimpsed the wonder of this living water of which he spoke because she replied, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

I imagine that this woman was nervous about her background and she tried to steer the conversation away from that. She probably was ostracized in the community and felt lonely. Perhaps she felt spiritually dry, wishing her life could be different. Maybe she felt her life was stagnant like the wellspring of her life had run dry and she had no hope.

And out of this hopelessness and dryness springs forth a thirst for life and freshness of spirit and purpose. And Jesus senses this in her and offers her what she needs most – a source of refreshment – a way to quench her thirst and not just temporarily. He offers her the gift of living water and assures her that "those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty" and that "the water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

What must this Samaritan woman have felt like? I imagine tears in her eyes and her heart racing and everything within her longing for this precious gift Jesus offers. And she says, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

And we aren't unlike this woman. Like the Samaritan woman, we become oblivious to the innermost vacuum of our souls and as a result can't even recognize our real malady anymore. The slow, relentless winding down of spiritual vitality in our lives continues and we miss its signs. And suddenly, the Savior's words which may have once caught hold of us like a clear, commanding voice are incomprehensible. Indeed, there is no thirst for God anymore, and there's no thirst for much of anything.

And it is to this rocky contour of our inner life that Jesus brings this astounding Word of his. He himself is the wellspring that never runs dry, and he keeps on gushing up into a living stream of life-giving water that grows into eternal life.

Jesus is such living water. And the water of life he brings us is what we call salvation. It is the blessing of the cross on which Jesus died and it is the power of his resurrection. It is the message of the Gospel that Jesus Christ died for us, so that we might live and live abundantly. And here today, in our lessons, Jesus is once again offering the gift of life to this Samaritan woman. What refreshment there is in God's grace toward sinners!

And this gift is not just for this Samaritan woman. It is for all God's people. It is for you and for me. And that is why, in one of my previous churches where we started a contemporary service, we named it "The River" because Jesus is the River with living water and he gives eternal life to all who put their full faith and trust in him. And so we are called to invite all we meet to come to the River of Life – to come to Jesus. May that truth help each of us to begin to rejoice in the promises of God.

And, you know, it is noteworthy that the story of this woman continues in ch. 4 of John's gospel, and we are told that this Samaritan woman began to have animated conversations with her neighbors, telling them of Jesus and all the things he had said to her. She probably didn't fully grasp the full meaning of what Jesus taught her, and yet, she spoke and acted like a woman who had taken a deep drink at a fresh well, and she was renewed.

She was no longer alone; community was beginning to mean some-thing to her again. She didn't dismiss this Jewish man named Jesus she met at the well as a deranged person. She was at the early stages of belonging to him in a faith she never dreamt could be her own. Her lie is no longer one lonely, spiritually dry day after another. Her parched soul ahs had

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life-giving water poured onto it, and she was beginning to learn what it could mean to live from the wellspring of grace which Christ offered her.

That same experience is meant for us, my friends. And sharing that message is why we gather here – to hear this Good News – to claim it – and to learn how to live it. May what we do here in the name of Christ be a source of refreshment for your soul. Come and taste and see that the Lord is good. Receive the gift of God – living water that will quench what is dry within you. Trust in God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

The psalmist says, “As deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” (Ps. 42:1) We all have that deep thirst which needs to be met. The water – the river – of life is ever fresh and sufficient for our needs. It comes to us from that same Lord who sat down by the well of Jacob long ago, and led a dried-up, hopeless life to living water that never runs dry. Just like the Samaritan woman, come to the water, my friends, and come today. Amen.