

## John 4:5-30, 39-42 – Lent 3 – Worship in Spirit and Truth – March 8, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

Have you ever seen a commercial for a new product—something you have never seen before—and think, “That’s *just* what I need.” Now, before watching you were content. You didn’t *think* you were missing anything. But after—you just had to have it. There were two commercials during the Super Bowl for special kinds of bottled water. And I am sure that is the reaction they were seeking.

Walking through the grocery store, there is a wall of water. Smart water, mineral water, alkaline water, distilled water, spring water, purified water, bubbly water. There is water from France and Fiji—from geysers and glaciers. Water is trendy right now. How do you know which one is right? And does it really make a difference when your water costs ten times more? Do the labels matter?

Our Gospel reading today is lengthy. And we didn’t even hear the whole account of the Samaritan woman at the well. This story has a number of connections to the story of Nicodemus from last week. Sure enough—they are very different people—with very different labels. He is a religious leader—wise, influential, popular. She is a Samaritan of questionable personal character. But they both find themselves in conversations with Jesus.

And both conversations have a decidedly theological flair. They talk about Jesus’ identity and His purposes for humanity. They both address worship in first century Israel. John likes to give us these theological dialogues. In fact, he gives us seven of them—just as we might expect. And they teach us a lot about our own discussions about the faith.

Maybe it seems natural for us when someone like Nicodemus comes to Jesus. He is moral—religious—intelligent. He knows the Scriptures. He even initiates the conversation. Although Jesus suggests a miracle is still necessary for him to understand. He must be born again.

But with the Samaritan woman, we have something else. And here we have a story that amuses as much as it surprises us. In that culture, it was highly irregular for a man of Jesus’ status to speak to someone like her. He is male, single, upright, and Jewish. Defined social boundaries ought to keep Him from speaking to her at all—but especially alone.

But that is exactly what He does. Here, Jesus begins the conversation. He asks her for a drink. It’s all about water. And it all happens at Jacob’s well.

In John’s Gospel so far, Jesus’ messianic presence both fulfills and overwhelms some feature of Jewish history or tradition. In chapter two, Jesus revealed His glory as he changed water into wine—but in pots used for rites of Jewish purification. He also travels to the temple and overturns the tables of the money changers—reclaiming the temple as a house of prayer—and not for the last time.

In chapter three—in his encounter with Nicodemus—Jesus challenges Israel’s teaching office—the Scribes and the Pharisees. As the new Rabbi of Israel, Jesus not only gets Nicodemus asking questions—He confronts him for not understanding the basic things of God. And attention grows among the Pharisees as our chapter begins.

But now, Jesus moves to the margins of Judaism. There was a real political and religious tension between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans worshipped

someplace else—Mount Gerizim had its own temple going back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC. The Samaritans are well known for rejecting Jerusalem. They have also intermarried among the nations—and this particular lady has made something of a pastime of it.

In our story, everything happens at Jacob’s well. It has served God’s people for generations—all the way back to the Patriarchs—before Israel even entered this Promised Land. And it is in this context—in this place—that Jesus asks her for a drink of water. And then He reveals Himself as the One who gives Living Water.

Now, this woman is at the well at noon—in the heat of the day—and alone. The well was a place for women to meet and to catch up on the latest talk. It’s not just about water. Her timing suggests social isolation. And it seems her lifestyle has left her out of touch—even with the Samaritans. Perhaps her promiscuity was the topic of the gossip when the other women met there. She has doomed her reputation and broken the morals of her community.

And this makes Jesus’ conversation with her that much more remarkable. He is crossing many boundaries—social, ethnic, religious, and even respectability. Every other Rabbi would have ignored her completely—or even hurried away. The Disciples are even astonished to find Him talking to her.

The conversations of Jesus are always interesting. But this one is dramatic. It takes us from social and political issues—to eternal and theological issues. And like Nicodemus, she stumbles through the conversation. She misunderstands Jesus. Here, Jesus moves from the water of Jacob’s well—to a water of much greater value. Jesus’ central statement reads like this.

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again (really it reads *never be thirsty forever*). The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The language of *living water* typically referred to *moving water*—a spring, river, or stream. *Still waters* were wells, ponds, or cisterns. In Rabbinic law—and even in early baptismal rites—only moving water was to be used in ritual washings and Baptisms. Jesus’ own Baptism happens at the Jordan River. But there was no moving water—no living water—in this place.

Again, the woman stumbles on the language of Jesus and misunderstands. She is stuck talking about the ordinary—when He has in mind something extraordinary. She is still thinking about water for her jar, not living water for her soul. He is talking about nourishing a deep spiritual need. Jesus’ water eliminates an eternal thirst. It leads to eternal life. Living water is life nourished by God. And Jesus is the one and only source of spiritual renewal.

Jesus employs the Bible’s frequent use of the link between water and life. Where there is water, there is vitality and flourishing. We build cities along rivers and oceans and lakes. Plants, animals, and people need what only water can give. And Jesus is using His situation—He is thirsty—He is sitting at a well—to make a point about spiritual life. As a well gives essential water to our bodies—so also does God supply fundamental spiritual sustenance to us in Jesus Christ.

The Prophet Jeremiah used such language before. Keep in mind that the Samaritans generally rejected the Prophets of this era. And this reveals a real poverty of faith for them. Even so, God speaks in Jeremiah 2, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

Isaiah used such language too, although his vision here is more expansive. It contains the same kind of rejection of that which cannot satisfy. In Isaiah 55, he says, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.”

Jesus is talking about new life. A life of the Holy Spirit—and of the truth. Water has been a vehicle of grace from the beginning of this Gospel. John came baptizing with water. Jesus turns water into wine. Jesus even says to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Christ Himself is the source of this precious, costly, valuable living water. It meets an eternal thirst deep down inside her soul. He will say more in John 7, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” And this kind of water can transform this woman’s predicament—freeing her from her life of sin and isolation.

But Jesus takes the promise a step further. This living water does not simply change our position, but it is a dynamic experience that brings life to our lives. The water will transform our lives as it *wells up* in an eternal direction. This same word is used as the Holy Spirit is poured out on great leaders of God’s people—changing the course and direction of their lives—Samson, David, John the Baptist, Paul.

Like last week, there is a lot more here. As I said, this is a long reading. Jesus addresses the nature of worship—as the temple is destroyed—as He becomes the new Temple. He addresses her cavalier understanding of marriage and sexuality. He reveals to His disciples the Gospel harvest He sets before them. And maybe most importantly, He reveals to the Samaritan woman at the well that He is the Christ. He even uses a very subtle “I Am” statement as He does so. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is God.

But this story concludes with this woman leaving her isolation—and she literally leaves her water jar—and takes the living water of Jesus with her—and to her Samaritan community. She sends the thirsty to Jesus. And they too embrace Him as the Savior of the world.

Living water is something like the soul-satisfying grace of God. It is the Word of God. It is the Sacraments. It is Jesus Himself—all He is—all He says—all He does. Jesus comes to bring eternal life as living water. And we need it—God’s gift of washing and refreshment—as something necessary to cleanse and satisfy our souls.

So, how about you? Are you thirsty? And not just for the latest fad water that costs way too much. Let’s not be so quickly taken in by slick advertising. But do you hunger and thirst for things of God—His Word—His Spirit—His guidance—His life?

We have spiritual needs that are sometimes hard to see—but are more real—and more important—than what we will find on the drink aisle of the grocery store. We make sure we are hydrated. Do we make sure our souls are filled too? Do you see the living water of Jesus as your most fundamental need? Do you see it as your greatest satisfaction?

Revelation ends with the eternal—and in the language of Jesus in John’s Gospel, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit... The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”

When we worship in Spirit and in truth—when we seek Christ in Word and Sacrament—Christ meets our eternal needs. Like this woman, we might look for our satisfaction elsewhere—in promiscuity—in false religious ideas—in our own hearts—in buying too much of a good thing—but there is only one source of living water.

Only Christ can offer us real, deep, profound, eternal satisfaction and fulfillment. So, find hope in His self-revelation as the Water of Life. And ultimately, as we enter the eternal kingdom of God in the new creation, the water of life that feeds the tree of life is for the healing of the nations. And based on what I saw on the news this week—the nations need some healing—and we do too.

So, keep drinking your water. It is good for your body, after all. But drink deeply of the living water in His Word—and in His Church. Take it all in. Think of such things meeting an eternal need—a need we can’t always see—as we thirst for things unseen. Jesus is the only One who can meet our desires for spiritual things. It is as Jesus says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*