

## **“Water in the Wilderness” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 3 March 8, 2026**

- I. **John 4:13-14** – <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
- II. **What route do you choose when going on a road trip?**
  - a. Most of us use our phones to navigate to our destination, and the routes are based on time – and now we can plan for traffic and road construction.
    - i. For the adventurous, the route might include going over passes or whatever the direct way is.
    - ii. Sometimes, the best route to go is the long way to avoid any trouble.
  - b. Just imagine planning a trip to Bend.
    - i. You might just take the direct route – Highway 26, driving about three hours...
    - ii. You might also want to avoid driving through the Mt Hood area, taking the alternate route of driving I-84 to The Dalles, then Highway 97 to Bend... adding an extra hour or so to the trip.
    - iii. Now, let’s imagine that the area leading up to Mt. Hood is full of terrible people... like an enclave of residents who can’t stand Oregon and its history... who would be outright hostile to you if you had to stop at a gas station.
    - iv. You might consider the route and just say, “I’m not going to risk the trouble of dealing with those people, I’ll just take the long way.”
  - c. The average Jewish person in Jesus’ day would travel north from Jerusalem to the region of Galilee with these thoughts in mind.
    - i. Rather than go through the region of Samaria, which takes about three days, most Jews traveled around Samaria adding two days of travel to the journey.
    - ii. Sure, going through Samaria was a shortcut, but no one wanted to deal with the bad feelings these people had for Jews – and vice versa!
  - d. The Samaritans were from the former northern kingdom of Israel, and they were a mixture of people with Jewish heritage and many other cultures.
    - i. By Jesus’ time, the Samaritans used the first five books of the Bible, or the Pentateuch, but had a mixed up version of God and worship.
    - ii. They didn’t believe Jerusalem and the temple was the center of worship, but instead it was on Mt. Gerizim.
    - iii. The interesting thing is that the Samaritans did believe that a type of savior or prophet would come into the world to explain the Scriptures and restore true worship.

- III. **Jesus chooses the direct route through Samaria in our Gospel reading.**
  - a. His disciples were probably wondering why anyone would go through that area... He's not interested in avoiding people, He is seeking the lost...
  - b. As He comes to a place with the well of Jacob, the mountain where the Samaritans worshiped would have been in the backdrop.
  - c. A woman is getting water, and Jesus asks her for a drink.
    - i. It was not normal or socially accepted for a man to approach a woman, but even more so that a Jew would approach a Samaritan... as it says, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." (v 9)
    - ii. In an encounter that crossed social and political boundaries, Jesus needed to show this woman and the Samaritan people that He was the true Messiah, the source of Living Water.
- IV. **We are like the Samaritan** woman, seeking water that never stops our thirst.
  - a. Even if we are in God's Word, we don't often look for it to change and correct us... we reinterpret and reshape it to fit the life we already live.
    - i. What God gives as truth becomes just a suggestion for us.
    - ii. His commands become "helpful guidelines" but not required for living.
    - iii. His Word becomes something we interpret until it agrees with us and our own way of thinking rather than God's.
  - b. The trouble with our way is that we then start looking for life in places that can never give it.
    - i. Like the Samaritan woman searching for fulfillment in one broken relationship after another, we chase happiness in the things we believe will finally satisfy us.
    - ii. We start worshiping the creation rather than the Creator – and seeking happiness in everything that is fleeting... or even destructive.
    - iii. We give up on the idea that God will provide what we need every day and try to supplement with our own provisions.
    - iv. We keep drawing water from wells that promise life but only guarantee that we will be thirsty again tomorrow.
    - v. All the while, the Living Water is right there in front of us.
  - c. When we consider how this woman misunderstood the Scriptures, her life shows the endless cycle of disappointment and discontent.
    - i. It's interesting that the Messiah she was looking for was supposed to explain the Scriptures.
    - ii. Yet Jesus does not only explain the truth, He is the Truth.
    - iii. As He revealed Himself as the Savior, He uses those key words, "I am" – now, I realize our translation today says, "I Who speak to you am He," but it reads more like, "I AM... the one now talking to you."
      - 1. If she had read Exodus, the name God calls Himself to Moses at the burning bush is I AM... Jesus is claiming to be more than a prophet who clarifies the Scriptures... He claims to be God.

- d. In a beautiful transition, the woman comes to believe as she sees the fulfilment of the Scriptures right in front of her.
- V. **Jesus is both the fulfilment of the Bible**, and the fulfilment of our hearts.
  - a. We walk through this wilderness of sin and brokenness, seeking anything that makes it a little better.
    - i. Remember the people wandering for 40 years in the wilderness?
    - ii. They were 100% dependent on God for every single day – no more than they needed, no less.
    - iii. Even when they wondered if the wilderness might consume them and they figured it might be better to just go back to the slavery of Egypt... God provided all they needed.
  - b. We rarely live like that because God has provided a multitude of choices for our needs to be met – and most of our wants...
    - i. Yet, these gifts of creation often tempt us to rely on ourselves, forget who receives the glory, and keep seeking more to satisfy our desires.
  - c. Jesus has an answer to a life of constant seeking... Living Water.
    - i. Life in Christ goes beyond trying to find comfort in the wilderness... it leads to contentment unto eternal life.
    - ii. The big reversal comes as Jesus seeks us out in the middle of the wilderness...
    - iii. We are trying to find things to make us happy and quench that thirst... and Jesus cuts through our wilderness with the Good News.
- VI. **And that Living Water still reaches us today.**
  - a. Jesus does not simply tell us where to find the water... He gives it... He is the source.
  - b. The Church has always recognized the connection between this Living Water and Holy Baptism.
    - i. In Baptism, water is joined to the Word of Christ... and what seems like ordinary water becomes something way bigger.
    - ii. In Baptism, Christ does exactly what He promises in John 4... as He washes away sin... gives new life... and puts a spring of water in us welling up to eternal life.
  - c. The water we draw from the wells of this world always runs out.
    - i. However, the water Christ gives never runs out.
    - ii. It redeems body, mind, and spirit... it restores what sin has broken.
    - iii. And it carries us through the wilderness of this life all the way to eternal life.
  - d. Living Water doesn't offer fleeting satisfaction... it changes us completely.
    - i. As those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior and source of our Living Water, we have a life that flows into eternity.
    - ii. And that is why Jesus says: "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again."

- iii. Salvation was won on the cross for all of us, and the forgiveness and life from Jesus create an unending supply of Living Water.
- e. The wells of this world will always leave us thirsty again tomorrow.... but the water Christ gives becomes a spring of life that never runs dry. Amen.