

SERMON TITLE: "Living Water: Gushing Water"  
SERMON TEXT: John 4:1-19, 39-42  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: August 8, 2021, at First UMC

### **INTRODUCTION**

Early on Tuesday morning, when the volunteers were harvesting vegetables from the church garden, Betty Christian got squirted in the face. I didn't see it, but I heard about it later. Apparently a raccoon had chewed a hole through the drip irrigation line. In the previous week, we learned that deer had been grazing in the garden. Now we've found out that thirsty raccoons have been helping themselves to our water lines. So instead of the nice slow drip on just the plants in the row, our irrigation system gave Betty a face full of gushing water.

In this summer of 2021, it seems like water is really on our radar. Sometimes we're talking about extreme drought, the lowest-ever-recorded water levels, and limitations on water usage. Other times, we're talking about downpours and flash floods that have threatened homes and lives. Not just here in Utah, but in so many places around the world, either too little or too much water has been a problem. And, many times, both have been true in the very same place, as it's going to take a lot more than a few downpours to refill our dried-up reservoirs, lakes, and wells.

Because the lack of water is such an issue this summer, we're spending some weeks refreshing ourselves in the living water stories from the Gospel of John. We began with the wedding story in John 2 in which Jesus made wine from transforming water. Then we read the Jesus-and-Nicodemus story in John 3, in which life was made possible because of birthing water. And now, we find ourselves in John 4, with Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Let's dip our buckets into this well of living water that Jesus describes as "gushing water."

## **1—GUSHING WATER BEGINS WITH WATER**

If we begin with the obvious, then it's fair to say that this story about gushing water begins with plain, ordinary, wet water. The reason Jesus stopped at the well was because he was tired and thirsty. The reason the Samaritan woman was there was because she needed to haul a jar of water back to her house. They both needed some of that thirst-satisfying H<sub>2</sub>O. For cleaning, for cooking, and for drinking, water was and is essential to human life.

The human need for water can easily be seen by looking at a map. Where are the most cities located? Alongside ocean coasts and lake shores, where populations have had access to transportation on boats, fish to eat, and water to play in. Cities have also thrived along rivers and creeks and their confluences, where water has been abundant for irrigating crops, generating power, and supplying water for cleaning, cooking, and drinking.

The Samaritan city of Sychar apparently didn't have those kinds of surface water, however, and so they depended on Jacob's well. You might recall that Abraham was the father of Isaac who was the father of Jacob. The first biblical reference to Jacob and a well is in Genesis 29. There we are *not* told that Jacob *dug* the well, but we learn instead that he moved a heavy stone off the top of the well so that Rachel could water her flocks. That was the first time that Jacob and Rachel ever met. Usually it took several shepherds gathered there at the same time to move the heavy stone. But Genesis 29 implies that Jacob moved the stone all by himself. Jacob's display of manly strength and helpfulness impressed Rachel and led to their eventual marriage.

Apparently it was a source of pride to the Samaritan woman at the well that her strong ancestor Jacob was closely associated with important water infrastructure that had served her people for nearly 2000 years. It's no wonder, then, that the Samaritan woman questioned, in verse 12, how Jesus could be greater than Jacob—when Jesus didn't even have a bucket! The human need for water was great, and Jacob and his well provided for that need. The Samaritan woman was right that, whether it's found

on the surface of the planet or comes from a well, gushing water begins with access to ordinary and essential water.

## **2—GUSHING WATER BRINGS LIFE AT A WHOLE NEW LEVEL**

What's also pretty clear from this story is that gushing water brings life to a whole new level. While Jesus certainly appreciated the well and the drink of water the woman gave him, he wanted to take the conversation a step farther. As Jesus said in verse 14, the living water he could give would become in her "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Jesus wanted the woman to realize that her life could be more than the daily grind of hauling up buckets of water and carrying them to her house. In fact, a lot about her life could be better.

You've heard the joke. After a long discussion, the first guy starts to sum it up or state the next steps by saying, "Well . . ." But before he can finish his thought, the other person chimes in, "That's a deep subject."

A deep subject is what Jesus and the woman at the well got into when Jesus brought up her marital status in verse 16. The talk that ensued about her many husbands indicates that this woman had experienced a great deal of unhappiness. We aren't told if she was repeatedly divorced or if her husbands had died, but it's obvious that she had experienced a tremendous amount of sadness and trouble. Jesus wanted her to know that she didn't have to just barely survive emotionally and physically. Things could be so much better. If she would connect with the Savior from God, if she could worship God in spirit and truth, then she could have eternal life.

When you hear the words "eternal life," you may think of the eternity of heaven after we die. That certainly is part of the meaning that Christians have understood. But Bible scholars tell us that, in the Gospel of John especially, whenever we read the term "eternal life," it means more than a future and infinite quantity of years. "Eternal life" is more like a joyful and purposeful quality of life that begins now, when we accept Jesus as our Savior and begin a life of faithfulness to his teachings. Jesus wanted

to share that good news with the woman at the well. He wanted her to know that gushing water brings life to a whole new level.

### **3—GUSHING WATER SHARES GOOD NEWS WITH OTHERS**

Because this story is so long, we skipped over part of it. Verses 28-30 indicate that the woman set down her water jar and hurried back to the city. There, she told the people about Jesus and urged them to come and see him for themselves. Then, in verse 39, we read that “many Samaritans from that city believed in [Jesus] because of the woman’s testimony.” In other words, the Samaritan woman was so happy about what Jesus had told her that she couldn’t contain herself. And so, we see another quality of gushing water: It shares good news with others.

When those citizens of Sychar heard what she said and came to Jesus, they heard his words of teaching, and many more believed. The living water gushed up in their souls, too, so that they also were able to share that good and joyful news.

The exuberant and gushing joy of the good news has inspired many fun camp songs that describe our faith in Jesus with watery images. Maybe you’ve heard these lyrics before and can remember the tunes.

Bu-bub-a-bub-a-lin’, bu-bub-a-bub-a-lin’ . . .  
 Jesus’ love is a bubblin’ over.  
 Jesus’ love bubbles in my soul.  
 Jesus’ love is a bubblin’ over.  
 Jesus’ love bubbles in my soul.<sup>1</sup>

Here’s another fun song . . .

Spring up, O well, within my soul.  
 Spring up, O well, and make me whole.  
 Spring up, O well, and give to me,  
 that life abundantly.<sup>2</sup>

Now, I’m going to have you participate a little bit. Each time, after I say “O well,” I want you to say, “Splish, splash.” Got it? “Splish, splash.”

Spring up, O well, (splish, splash) within my soul.  
Spring up, O well, (splish, splash) and make me whole.  
Spring up, O well, (splish, splash) and give to me,  
that life abundantly.<sup>2</sup>

The gushing water of good news and eternal life is hard to contain. It wants to spring up and bubble out from us. What Jesus did for the Samaritan woman and her neighbors, Jesus wants to do for everyone. And when we've got that living water bu-bub-a-bub-a-lin' in our souls, we'll want to share it with other people. Gushing water absolutely shares the good news.

### **CONCLUSION**

There was a story in the United Methodist News this week that connected well with this Bible story. In North Carolina, there's a United Methodist worship service that meets outdoors alongside the Nantahala River. The River of Life ministry provides a worship service every Sunday morning, just before the congregation and any visitors put their rafts and kayaks into the river. For 15 years, this ministry has been reaching river people who probably wouldn't otherwise attend a church. Alongside the river, they learn about Jesus, who is still offering living water today. And from those river people, the ministry has raised enough money over those years to fund 135 water wells in the country of Haiti.

Real, wet, ordinary gushing water meets the needs of life in North Carolina and in Haiti. That's a huge blessing. But it isn't just H<sub>2</sub>O. It's also gushing water that meets emotional and spiritual needs at a whole new level. When that happens, the joyful good news can't be contained. It bubbles and springs and bursts out in an eagerness to share that better life with others. May we drink deeply from such gushing water!

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<sup>1</sup>Author unknown.

<sup>2</sup>By L. Casebolt, lyrics in public domain. Variation author unknown.