Lenten Series Week 2

John 4:1-42  [The Woman, the Water, and Jesus]  “…whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Introduction:
Last week, we listened in on Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus and considered the great love of God demonstrated in the gift of Jesus Christ along with the call to be born again through faith in Him. As you reflect on this past week, where did you experience this great love of God or how did you share this love with someone?

Overview:
We don’t have to look very far to know that we live in a divided world. You hop onto Facebook or twitter, and it feels a bit like opening the door of your home during a tornado. We are a world divided by politics, race, gender and sexuality, religion, and even opinions about the latest Star Wars movie. In this milieu, it is easy to demonize the opposition. It becomes commonplace to dehumanize and create caricatures instead of treating people as individuals created in the image of God.

Truth be told, the world of Jesus was no different. They didn’t have social media, but tensions were high, and divisions were fierce. One of the worst rifts at the time was between Jews and Samaritans. This was a historic schism going back over 500 years to the time of the divided kingdom of Israel. After the Assyrian invasion of northern Israel in 722BC, the land was repopulated from other nations. Many of the remaining Israelites intermarried and while there was scattered worship of YHWH, the region was forever regarded as tainted by the Jews in and around Jerusalem (2 Kings 17:24-41). Relationships between the two groups grew more strained over time. A century before Jesus, a Jewish king went into Samaria and destroyed their temple, and during Jesus’ lifetime, Samaritans came to Jerusalem and desecrated the temple by spreading human bones.

Needless to say, during Jesus’ ministry, there was little love lost between the Jews and Samaritans. The two groups avoided each other as often as possible, and, when traveling to Jerusalem, Jews living in Galilee would generally take the much longer and more difficult road along the Jordan River to avoid walking through Samaria (the modern-day West Bank). And yet, in John 4, Jesus enters Samaria, sits down at a well, and begins to engage a Samaritan in a conversation about faith. What makes the scene even more surprising is that this Samaritan is a woman and that she has a sordid past and present.

By the end of the conversation, Jesus has revealed himself to be the long-awaited Messiah, and the woman has gone back to her town as a witness, declaring “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” Her life is transformed by this encounter with Jesus. As you read this text, consider Jesus’ interaction with the woman and how the encounter with Jesus becomes a catalyst for change.

Prayer:
Lord God Almighty, by the power of Your Spirit open our ears to hear and soften our hearts to receive. Speak to us by Your word and instruct us in Your truth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

Biblical Text:  Read John 4:1-30
Discussion:

1) John says that Jesus “had to pass through Samaria.” What’s going on here? If you are comfortable, share a time you felt led by God to step into a potentially awkward or volatile situation.

2) What do you think brings the woman to the well at noon (the 6th hour)?

3) Why does Jesus ask her for a drink? What do you think of her response? How might you have responded if you were in her place?

4) In Jesus’ time, living water generally referred to running water. This could include rainwater, rivers, streams, underground springs, etc. Living water was necessary for ritual washings and purification. It was used for baptism as with John the Baptist. Why do you think Jesus uses this particular term? What does Jesus mean by “living water?”

5) What does Jesus mean by saying the person who drinks this water will never be thirsty again (v. 14)?

6) As you think about your life, where have you experienced this living water? Have there ever been times when you felt “thirsty”? If so, how do we understand these moments in light of Jesus’ words?

7) What do you make of the woman’s response to Jesus’ in verse 15?

8) Why does Jesus suddenly tell her to call her husband? How is this related to the conversation they have been having?

9) The woman initially tries to hide her situation from Jesus. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were tempted to hide or cover up? What was the result of hiding? What happened when things came out into the light?

10) As you look at the whole encounter, how does Jesus’ knowledge of the woman’s life impact her? Why do you think this is? (consider v. 29)

11) Tim Keller writes in his book The Meaning of Marriage, “To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” Where do we see the woman’s story in this statement? Where do we see our own?

12) What does it mean to worship the Lord in Spirit and in Truth?

13) The Jews and Samaritans had a long-time debate about where true worship of God would take place. The Jews worshipped in Jerusalem, and the Samaritans had their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. Jesus quite plainly tells the woman that the Samaritans have it wrong, but he adds that neither location is going to be around forever. The worship God is looking for is not about geography. As you think about the church today (either ours specifically or the church as a community of believers) where might we be tempted to emphasize things that don’t really matter for true worship? What might Jesus say to us if he were here?

Application:

Last week, we heard about the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and this week, we read about living water. This general theme of “life” as a gift from God is prevalent in John’s gospel. As Jesus says in John 10:10, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” It is also clear that we don’t always experience or receive this life. Nicodemus needed to be born again by the Spirit. The woman at the well had to walk through the pain of her own brokenness. As you go throughout your week, consider the ways in which you are experiencing this “abundant” life that Jesus has come to give and pay attention to the things that get in the way.

Pray:

Heavenly Father, so fill us with your Spirit that we might have a river of life welling up in us and flowing out for the life of the world. Amen.