

Seeing the Thirsty God through Living Waters

Sermon on the Third Sunday in Lent (3/8/2026)

Premkumar Immanuel Clement

Growing up in India in a small coastal town that lacked sufficient potable drinking water, it was common for people to carry empty pots day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, to fetch water from distant places.

One way to secure drinking water in those days was to wait for the steam rail engine that arrived early in the morning, carrying passengers from distant places. The engine also carried water. It was not unusual for women to line up where the engine stopped and wait for the locomotive driver to release the high pressure by letting out hot water. The women would carefully collect the water in their pots while keeping a safe distance.

On one such day, I accompanied my mother. I stood at the front of the queue and placed the pot beneath the water outlet of the rail engine. Without being aware of the water's heat, I kept my hands near the faucet. When the engine driver suddenly released the hot water, the hot steam burned my hands. Even today, I remember the way my mother cried in agony when she saw my plight.

From my early days, I learned what it meant to **thirst for water**. I learned how deeply human life depends on water.

But today's sermon invites us to look at water differently. Today, we are invited to think about **water that quenches the soul**. The Gospel tells us that the one who provides living water is also **thirsty to give it to thirsty souls**.

Water is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. Sometimes it appears as destructive and sometimes life-giving. Water destroyed everything during Noah's time. The waters of the Red Sea allowed the Israelites to escape from the clutches of Pharaoh. The prophet Amos proclaimed that **justice should roll down like waters**. Water was changed into wine when Jesus performed his first miracle at the wedding in Cana.

But the water we encounter in today's scripture readings points to something deeper. Here, **water becomes a central symbol of faith**.

In the Exodus passage we heard today, the Israelites had no water to drink. Being thirsty is a basic human physiological problem. Quenching one's thirst could be solved by searching for water. Or, if they had faith, they could ask God to help them quench their thirst.

Instead, they exceeded their limits and **put God to the test**.

Under ordinary circumstances, their complaint might have been understandable. But these were the same people who had witnessed the mighty acts of God—how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt through Moses.

Yet they quarreled with Moses and asked:

“Did you bring us out here to die of thirst?”

“Is God really present among us?”

Their complaint was not merely about water. It revealed something deeper: **their lack of trust in God's presence**.

Moses was in a difficult position. He cried out to God, essentially saying, “What am I going to do with these people? They are still doubting you. They do not believe that you are with them.”

Is it not strange that their faith depended on whether or not they had water to drink?

Yet God responded with grace. Moses struck the rock, and water gushed out to quench their thirst.

Even amid the Israelites' lack of faith, **God provided material water**. But God desired to give them something more—**living water**. God was thirsty to give it freely. It is not simply water that quenches physical thirst; it is water that brings **renewed life**.

Today's Gospel reading from John presents a different scene. Here we see **a thirsty Jesus** asking a Samaritan woman for water. But the story ultimately reveals that the Samaritan woman receives **living water that transforms her life**.

She came to the well at an unusual hour. She deliberately chose that time to avoid people. Wells were normally places of gathering and conversation. But people discriminated against her. Perhaps they ridiculed her because of her moral reputation.

The Samaritan woman had lived a difficult life. Her inner soul was empty. She had given and given—five husbands had passed through her life. She had reached a point where life must have seemed exhausting and painful. Now she was living with a man who was not her husband.

But the kind of person she encountered in Jesus was different.

Jesus did not accuse her, even though he knew her story. He asked her for water, even though she was a Samaritan. He did not treat her the way others treated her. Instead of rejecting her, **he approached her first**.

She encountered someone respectful, kind, and compassionate—someone who broke every barrier of hostility between Jews and Samaritans.

There was **no judgment. No accusation.**

Only a simple and humble request for water.

But Jesus was also preparing to give her something in return.

In the middle of their conversation, Jesus offered her **“living water.”**

She began to sense that God sent Jesus. She is looking at Jesus as the living water. She understood something important about. The living water that Jesus offers is the grace that takes away one's sin. It makes one anew and allows one to lead a new life. Living water is not stagnant; it flows. It moves.

The living water Jesus offered would enable her to move away from the stagnant life she had been living.

Stagnant water cannot sustain life.

But living water brings renewal.

She began to see something else as well: **the thirst in Jesus himself**—his deep desire to offer the gift of new life.

As Jesus spoke of living water, the woman who had lived in emptiness began to feel something change within her. Her inner reservoir was beginning to fill.

She realized that she was not an empty clay jar but a vessel capable of shining with light and life.

The true light that enlightens everyone had entered her world.

At first, she could not fully understand what she was seeing. But gradually she recognized the truth in the presence of this thirsty God who stood before her.

She had told Jesus only half the truth when she said she had no husband. But Jesus revealed the fuller truth: the man she was living with was not her husband.

Yet instead of condemning her, Jesus revealed himself as the one who knew her fully and still accepted her.

She began to realize that Jesus was sent by God—that he was the Messiah, the one who brings life and truth.

Something remarkable happened.

She left her water jar, returned to the city, and invited her neighbors:

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done.”

She wondered aloud, “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

The Gospel of John tells us that **the Word became flesh and lived among us**, yet the world did not recognize him.

The world did not know him because it did not understand what it was seeing.

But the Samaritan woman **recognized the thirsty God standing before her**. And by receiving the living water he offered, she became a witness to others.

Today’s Gospel lesson teaches us something important: **relationships can change us**.

In the difficult world of human relationships, some people take more than they give. Some people drain us; they take water out of our bucket.

Relationships can be demanding and exhausting. Sometimes they leave people wounded, broken, divorced, and empty.

But thanks be to God, some people come into our lives with a different spirit.

They meet us where we are.

They accept us with whatever history we carry—including our broken relationships.

Their acceptance becomes a great grace—a spring of living water.

And suddenly we sense that our inner bucket is filling again with life-giving water.

At that moment, God’s grace reaches us in many forms. We no longer need to search endlessly for water day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

When that grace comes, we have the opportunity, as Paul Tillich once said, **“to accept the fact that we are accepted.”**

We no longer see ourselves as criticized, judged, inferior, or unworthy. Instead, we discover that the life-giving grace embraces us when we receive **living water**.

In our lives, there are also certain **“Jesus people”** who meet us at the well.

These are people who somehow make everything better when we are with them. Their presence brings healing. Their kindness fills our buckets with respect and self-esteem.

We left them with more energy than when we arrived. We leave with a renewed sense of well-being.

Through them, the grace of living water flows into our lives.

But in this story, the woman leaves not only with renewed energy. The living water she receives awakens **a new faith**.

Water becomes connected with faith.

She becomes a witness. She goes out and proclaims what she has experienced. She becomes one of the partners in Jesus' ministry, leading many other Samaritans to faith.

Living water breaks through boundaries. It flows across Jewish territory and Samaritan territory. It flows across all lines of discrimination and prejudice.

The living water of Christ flows **for all people**.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the living water that quenches our thirst and brings peace to our souls.

May this church become a well where all who come may receive living water.

Amen.