

John 4:5-42 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

35 Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

“The Gift of God”

We all worry. We worry about aging. We worry about family. We worry about our lives. These days, the whole world is worried about COVID-19, the pandemic the World Health Organization is calling **Coronavirus**.

As a prudent precaution, Shiloh Church will not have physical services this week. The consistory and I want to take precautions against the virus by having the sermon online instead of gathering all our bodies in one place. The 24th verse of our reading says:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and Truth.”

In a way the Coronavirus is helping us. We have to be faithful and worship in Spirit and Truth now. But still, even without gathering, even without being exposed people will worry: *“Will I catch the virus? Will someone I love die unexpectedly?”* Our souls are restless. We worry.

We worry that our wrinkles are getting deeper and our bodies weaker. I worry sometimes, too. I am human. Every morning when I look in the mirror I find a new flaw: an age spot, a playful wrinkle on my face, or a few crows feet in the corner of my eyes.

It's scary to get older. It's scary to experience changes in our body. But all this fear is based on the belief that I am this body. We are not these bodies. You are a spirit that God has granted eternal life to. These bodies have an expiration date; which makes plastic surgery and Botox seem pointless and crazy, when you think about it deeply.

(By the way, even when people inject Botox in their face, you can still tell that they are not 21 anymore.) Unfortunately, they look more like surprised lizards, than beautiful people. Worrying about aging doesn't make us look younger, and no amount of poison injected into our face is going to improve the situation.

We live in scary times. But there is a solution. I want you to know that even when times are scary, God takes care of you. Even in times that try our souls, the church is working for you. Your God is a mighty God; more powerful than any virus. Why worry? God stands with Shiloh Church. I stand with Shiloh Church. Do not be afraid. Your God is a mighty God.

I am praying for everyone in this congregation. Do not be afraid. I want you to stay healthy and happy during these difficult times. Do not be afraid. God is your rock, your salvation, and even your health in the face of the Coronavirus.

From the dawn of humanity, people have been searching for a precious water source that will keep them young and healthy forever. Some scholars think Alexander the Great may have been looking for a river that healed the limitations of old age. Before his death in 323 BC, Alexander may have been searching for the fountain of youth.

The Middle Ages also had tales of life giving water. During the 12th century, a king known to Europeans as Prester John, supposedly ruled a land that had a river of gold and a fountain of youth.

But the name, linked most closely to the search for a fountain of youth, is 16th century Spanish explorer; Juan Ponce de Leon. Ponce de Leon discovered the state of Florida while looking for a precious source of water, that kept people young forever. He searched and searched for this miraculous water, but the famous conquistador never found it.

Do you want to know why? The fountain of youth doesn't want to be found this way. It is much more subtle than that. The fountain of youth is surrounding us always. It is the source of being, found not in a place or time, but recognized spiritually.

"The gift of God" is being offered to all people all the time, we just need to recognize it. The Samaritan woman in our Gospel reading struggled to recognize it, as well. She asked Jesus about earthly rules, like how can a Jew talk to a Samaritan? The Samaritan woman was searching for an earthly answer to understand Jesus, but he spoke on a whole different level. Jesus said:

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

This "living water", this "gift of God", this "fountain of youth", is not something we can find in a physical place. It's not a special cream or bubble bath that will keep your body young and pretty forever. It may not even make the body's wrinkles disappear. But it's right here, before us, all the time, being offered by Christ.

The "gift of God" is right here, in this holy place and simultaneously right there at home where you are reading these words. God's presence, sign, and seal of regeneration are upon you. So whether you worship at home or physically in the sanctuary here, the gift of God is being offered to the souls of Shiloh Church every Sunday. **Rain or shine, snow or sleet, Coronavirus threat or not, the Gospel of Christ will be spread.**

Regardless of circumstances, Jesus offers life, joy, hope, and peace all the time: we just need to accept it. We need to recognize it, and accept it. This life giving water is not in sunny Florida or even Fiji, (although the water there is delicious). This life giving water is Jesus Christ himself, being offered to us in the stillness of our conscious experience.

However, it is subtle. You could miss it entirely if you fail to pay attention. When we only search for outside beauty and physical longevity, we can miss the

whole point of life. We can make the same initial mistake the Samaritan woman makes in John, and forget about the gift of the Spirit. Eventually she forgets about the material jar. The Samaritan woman finds great joy in the soul and leaves the water jar to tell her whole city about this gift she recognized in the presence of God.

Laughter is a gift of the Spirit, too, so let's take a break and listen to this joke. I don't usually tell jokes in Lent, but desperate times call for desperate measures. :) So here we go...

Bella, a middle-aged woman, had a heart attack and left her body in a near death experience. She saw a bright light and heard St. Peter's voice, "Bella, it's not your time to go. You still have another 30 years to live."

Immediately, she flew back into her body and resumed mortal existence. Bella felt renewed. She had a new reason to live, so she scheduled major plastic surgery: a face-lift, liposuction, and a tummy-tuck. She dyed her hair red, a new color, that made her look 10 years younger.

The next day when she crossed the street, Bella was hit by a speeding car. She died again, flew out of her body, and saw the bright light. "Hey, what happened?" Bella complained. "I thought you said I had another 30 years?"

St. Peter says, "I'm sorry, Bella, but with all the plastic surgery, I didn't recognize you."

We all want to live forever. And we want to look fabulous doing it. ☺ However, as you know, the body does not live forever. Thus, the Fountain of Youth is not a location on the earth: it's not a special cream or procedure.

Where is the soul? Does the soul have a GPS location? Is it bound by satellite orbit? No. *The soul is free of time and space.*

When we pray, meditate, read the Scriptures, and come to church, we are drinking from that fountain of youth. We are being "soul-ful". We may not look 21 forever on the outside, but we are grooming a youthful spirit, not only for this moment, but for all of eternity. When we give time to God, in whatever form, we are caring for the soul. We are drinking from "The Fountain of Youth".

I often visit older people, who live in challenging circumstances, sometimes in dementia units or nursing homes. I can tell you from experience that people have very different responses to life's challenges. Some people have a youthful spirit which radiates through their fragile bodies. You can see joy in their eyes. They have found the life giving water Jesus is talking about.

Others, in the same circumstances lose hope and forget the meaning of life. They think that the outside world, the objects we have, the people we know, is all there is. They are blind to God's free gift, and the comfort it provides.

The story of the Samaritan woman in John is an epic tale, full of gems and great teachings. We could analyze it for weeks. At this time of uncertainty in the world, let's see if we can squeeze out one more gem of wisdom out of the many, that helps in our time and place.

The Samaritan woman was suffering. She didn't have the Coronavirus, but she was not having a happy life. She lost 5 husbands in one way or another, and at the moment she talked with Jesus, she lived with a man without being married to him.

This may be something we easily accept in the 21st century, but it was not a common practice in the first century. She could be stoned to death. It would have been a scandal that this Samaritan, a woman, living in sin even talked to a holy man. Jesus, just by talking with her, offered her something that she couldn't get anywhere else.

The Samaritan woman received forgiveness, acceptance, and her dignity was restored. In a few moments by a well, her whole life was changed. She was so full of joy and excitement that she left her water jar at the well and ran back to the city. She was so excited that she invited everyone to Shiloh UCC. ☺ OK... not exactly. She did something even better. She preached about Jesus. She told everyone in her city that she met the Messiah. Then many people from the Samaritan town flocked to Jesus and began to believe.

Jesus knew that the Samaritan woman was thirsty for a meaningful life. Jesus knew that she needed "the gift of God" the life giving water that only he could give. Our world is full of thirsty people; especially in these times. When panic and fear fills the world, we need "the gift of God" even more. When the threat of Coronavirus paralyzes countries, states, cities, and individuals, people need "the gift of God."

Who will tell the suffering Samaritans of our time about God's free gift?

Augustine writes in his "Confessions," "(God)You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find rest in you." We cannot find rest in watching TV, eating food or even by paralyzing our brow with Botox. Worldly comforts wear off quickly. We can only find lasting peace in God. Life giving water does not come from the world. It comes from the well we find right here in this moment. **In God's presence, we find rest.**

As you grow spiritually, be grateful, for you are blessed. You are God's beloved, already at the well, ready to drink. While humanity is constantly searching for an

outside source of water that will provide youth and eternal life, God is offering us living water for free. We don't even have to travel to a special place. God is offering us this gift, right here, right now. It is beyond the limitations of space and time.

We don't have to wait to drink from this well. We don't have to search any longer. God's living water is waiting for us in the silence of our souls, deep in our hearts.

In reality, God is the only one who can quench our spiritual thirst and fill our souls. We may enjoy the comforts of this world, but material goods can only satisfy us temporarily.

God gives us rest eternally. Knowing we will never die, brings a peace to our hearts. We can relax and live courageously. Some beings have such a peace that it makes them want to share it with everyone. Only Christ can fill our hearts with joy and peace so fully that we cannot help but go out into the world and tell everyone about it.

So what are you going to do with the living water you received this morning? What will you do with the free gift you have received from God? Will you recognize it? Will you value it? Will you share it with others? ... **Amen.**

Pastoral Prayer for 3-15-2020

Loving Christ, we wait at the well for your wisdom. Grant us discernment and guidance to receive your deep mysteries. Meet us in this moment and baptize us with living water. Holy One, we ask for your inspiration to drink from the cup you provide.

Wash over our dry souls and bring us to new life. Quench our thirst and empower us to spread your good news to all the people in our daily lives. Encourage us to pass on your message of forgiveness and acceptance in our homes and neighborhoods. Bless us and fill us at the well, so that we may have spiritual gifts to give the world. Bless us and fill us with your grace, so that we may do your will.

Eternal Physician, healer of souls, send your compassionate Spirit into the hospitals and nursing homes. Lift up your people and ease their suffering. We pray for the weak and lonely, for the sick and those who are mourning. We also pray for the people on our prayer list.

Precious Christ, life begins in water, our lives begin and end in your presence. In the next few moments of silence, we ask you to refresh our souls and minds, and bless us with your living water....

Silence

The Lord's Prayer