

Life Sustained

March 8, 2026

Based on John 4:5-42

The story we just watched from Jesus and the Woman at the well is one that kicks off a theme of water in week 3 of Lent. Water is an important commodity. It was in Bible times as well as today. The drought that we are experiencing now with climate change will make for an interesting growing season for our farmers. Friday's moisture will help but it may be too late for some winter wheat.

Water is a big conversation in the western US. Municipalities are seeking water for buildings and homes. States are arguing over water and we know about our neighbors to the east in Nebraska and the Ogalla aquifer that is not regenerating like it used to. If you want to build a new house today in Morgan county the cost of a quality water tap is more than the total cost of my first home. Water was just as important in Bible times. The story from Exodus and John's gospel remind us that water is the key to many physical and even social events and stigmas.

In Exodus the people are in the desert of Sin according to this writer. The sin that these people are experiencing is because they do not know how to get along with others. The refugees from Egypt are bickering with anybody who will listen and poor Moses seems to get the brunt of it. The people are thirsty and if Moses is not going to do something about it then

they might as well just go back to Egypt because even though they were slaves at least they did not die of thirst.

Moses takes out his cell phone and starts texting with God. He begs God to do something before they revolt and everything they have done up to this point to give them their freedom might just be destroyed. God sends back a couple rolling on the floor with laughter emojis and tells Moses to just chill. He will take care of it. God tells Moses to take some elders with him and that God will stand on top of a rock. When Moses sees God he is supposed to strike that rock with the stick he struck the Red Sea with when they crossed into the desert when they were being chased by Pharaoh.

I don't know why God told him to take the elders but it was probably not a bad idea. Come on (elders named) we got to get some water for these folks. Then after Moses does this the elders are to report to the people that there is water to be received. God is providing water and more importantly for the welfare of the people. This is why we know God as my rock and redeemer and is glorified in Psalm 19: 14 "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." and Psalm 78:35 "They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer."

Moses named this place Massah and Meribah which means quarreling and testing. Could you imagine if we named our churches after the way people acted. Instead of the United Presbyterian Church they could be the

bickering Presbyterians of the Tight-fisted Presbyterians; we might have a church in town called the Gossiping Methodists, or the Lazy Lutherans. I don't think those names would attract many new members. The people were upset and let's face it if we are upset we are not the nicest to be around. We are always looking for proof to see if the Lord is present with us or not?

Life is a journey that seeks stability in the midst of constant change. It is a weird thing that we do. We say that we hate change but change is inevitable. The sooner we can wrap our heads around this truth the happier we are going to be. But I know people who never did. They will tell you over and over again how things were better back in the day. The problem is we don't live back in the day and the reality is that life was not that good then either but our brains have a way of filtering out all the hard things.

Moses does something really important here when the people are ready to go back to Egypt. Moses does not try to solve it on his own, he instead takes the issue to God. God proves once again that God's essence is love, abundance, forgiveness and providence. God could have said screw you all good luck let me know how that scratchy dry throat and tongue feels. But instead God provided for the people. And something that I learned this week, that rock was transportable. They took it with them wherever they went and when they camped they put the rock on the ground and water flowed again.

Now I do not know whose job it was to tote that rock. It might have been the guy who had misbehaved. Yo Fred, because you sinned last, today you are carrying the water rock. Maybe the elders had to carry it, Jeff today it is your turn and ___ you have tomorrow. No wonder it is so hard to find elders today! Moving right along...

Jesus and the woman at the well is a story that brings out the theme in John's gospel to come and see. In the eastern Orthodox tradition the woman has been given a name even. She is named Photini. In their tradition Photini goes on to have several children, she restores a man's sight and becomes known as the first evangelist. She is venerated as a saint and has a feast day on February 26.

This is a story of a woman who is thirsting just like the Israelites were in the desert. They believe they are thirsting for just plain ordinary water, but they come to realize that God gives them the water of life. You may have picked up on all the social cues and mores of the day that Jesus broke by even having the conversation with this woman. It begins in nationality; she is a Samaritan and he is Hebrew. A man talking to a woman at the well in broad daylight. The woman even being at the well in the heat of the day and by herself. These are red flags for impropriety.

Jesus really wants a drink of water and what he gets is a woman with an attitude. There is so much about this scene. Jesus hangs in there and meets her without guilt or shame being passed on to her. Who can blame

her for having an attitude. She has been dumped on for most of her life. That's why she is getting water when it is so hot and no other women will come with her. She is just doing her best to survive and Jesus comes along, wants a drink, and does his mystery talking about living water. I don't know about you but I really sympathize with this woman. She is living in hell and doing her best just to get by.

I think there are a lot of people that are that way today as well. Race, language, immigration status, nationality, gender, all pile up on top of people and they struggle to find peace. You talk about trying to find normalcy in a changing world, think of all the things some of our neighbors are going through today.

The living water restores not just individuals but communities. We want so bad for there to be justice, but there are two kinds of justice, punitive and restorative. We seem to like being punitive because it is easy. It is black and white. We get to decide who gets rewarded and who goes to jail. But the living water restores people to a place of community. The woman goes back to town and tells everyone about the man that she has met who is the Messiah. The good news that she brings restores her with her community.

Writer and activist Adrienne Renee Brown writes about practicing restorative justice. "Choose patience, communication, mediation, curiosity, boundaries, and uprooting harm over cancellation, public humiliation,

ghosting people, or other methods of disposing of people. The more you practice it personally, the more you will be able to support others through it politically and collectively.”

God meets us in our thirst, not to scold us but to sustain us with a grace that never runs dry. As we journey towards the cross we are half way there now. May our lessons and our lives reflect the love of Christ that journey with us. Amen.