

## **May our hearts be open to God's lifegiving living water**

Third Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2026

May our hearts be open to God's lifegiving, living water.

The Samaritan woman came that day to Jacob's Well from the village of Sychar, just as she had done every other day. Coming to gather water for her daily needs. Her name is never mentioned, but for the sake of the story I will call her Merium. She did not know that on this day, unlike all others, she would encounter a Rabbi who would offer her a drink that would transform her life.

The story plays with the imagery of water as it dances back and forth between its literal and metaphorical meaning, and between what Merium was capable of grasping, and the new truth that Jesus was trying to reveal to her. It is also a story about the value and dignity of every human life. This woman who came to the well that day, may have been on the lower rungs of social life in Sychar, currently living with a man who was not her husband, and previously having not one, but five husbands. Merium was not the kind of a woman you would automatically think of inviting to your child's birthday party or to any important social gathering. Her life was probably a hard one. On that day as she made her usual trek to the well, instead of being unseen by those around her, she would meet a man who would deeply see her and know her. The Jewish teacher Jesus would look right at her and engage her in conversation, thereby elevating her status, giving her value and a purpose. Restoring her dignity.

As they saw each other for the first time at the well, Jesus began with a simple request, “Give me some water to drink.” Merium replied: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” He 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.’” What was the meaning of these words; living water?

Through metaphor, Jesus was offering Merium something new, soul-enlivening way of life. A new Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. But she could not yet see what he was offering. She could not grasp the deeper meaning of Jesus words, because in her normal level of awareness, her mind and heart would only allow her to understand a basic literal interpretation to what Jesus was saying. He was speaking metaphorically of living water, she was hearing literally. So, Merium asked: “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” To understand Merium’s cognitive struggle that day, we need to picture what life may have been like for her. Existence in Samaria was hard for most people. Most struggled just to survive day to day. Yet an unmarried woman’s existence was even harder. Much like every other Samaritan, her goal for the day was laser focused, to procure just enough water and food to get her through the day. No other interests were more important, at least not yet, least of which some kind of deep philosophical esoteric discussion like what Jesus was offering.

Jesus knew it would take some work to get through to Merium, to open her eyes. Here’s his response from the Message Bible: “Everyone who drinks

this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.” Jesus was offering Merium, not some thirst quenching, spring-fed, clear cool refreshing water, but a quality of life with God that was deep and intimate and joy filled. An intimate reality and existence that would have no end. The kind of life God intends for all of us to experience.

But how would Merium respond to Jesus’ offer of never–ending water? She said to him: “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!” She’s was still not getting it, still spiritually blind. So, Jesus would have to take a stronger tactic to shake her awake. As a total stranger to Merium, he spoke out loud into the light of day, Merium’s dirty laundry, her deep shame; of having not one, or two, or three, or four, but five previous marriages, and currently living with a man who was not her husband. In the culture of that time her lifestyle would have been shocking. She must have been stunned and shaken by Jesus’ words. Thankfully, his hard but loving words finally received their desired effect, cracking open her heart just enough, so that she could begin to truly see. Merium now recognized that this simple Galilean teacher was more than just a teacher, but a true prophet of God.

The conversation was finally breaking free of its literal constraints and was beginning to get somewhere! Now they were going deeper. She asked Jesus which temple the people should worshipped at; the one on Mt. Gerizim there in Samaria, or the one in Jerusalem. Back and forth their conversation

went between Jesus and this Samaritan woman, spiraling deeper and deeper, moving inexorably towards one final glorious crescendo.

Jesus told Merium: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Jesus was telling her not to get hung up on which church or sanctuary or Nave to worship in. But that God is meant to be worshiped in Spirit and truth in any place, even right here at a well.

With Merium’s heart cracked open and softened, she was beginning to perceive the deeper truth. She approached cautiously the question that was the central issue of life not just for her, but for anyone living in Palestine at the time. Her heart had known its Reality all her life, but she was only now able to see with new eyes, to sense who this One was standing in front of her. But she was afraid to speak it out loud. So, she said to Jesus: “I know that Messiah is coming [the savior and redeemer of our people.] When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Her heart nearly stopped beating. Time seemed to stand still as she awaited Jesus’ response.

Then he spoke the words she had longed to hear: “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” Her heart now burst forth in exultation. In Jesus’ final words, he affirmed what her heart had known all along but was only now revealed to her conscious mind. The glorious truth that the Spirit now

revealed to her. The long-awaited messiah was the one standing right in front of her. The eyes of Merium's heart were now opened wide, allowing the glorious life-giving water Jesus had been speaking of to flood into her soul. Merium was transformed. She was born from above. She was scaling the heights, no longer grubbing on the ground, worrying and scrapping around for her next meal or cup of water.

Oh, the struggles and stresses of life would still assault her. But now there resided within her, a deep and abiding presence, the living water from above, one who would walk with her through any darkness still to come.

Maria's story is not hers alone, it is your story and mine as well. Jesus has called out to each of us, and continues to do so, offering us his living water, yet we still sometimes act like Merium, struggling to understand what it means. When we get all wrapped up in the stresses and struggles of life; when all we can see is our ecclesiology and liturgical structure and Rite I and Rite II services, we can be blinded like Merium to deeper truth. Believing firmly that our theology and our Episcopal Church is the only mountain on which to worship. Jesus tries to reveal to us a grander vista, getting us to see that this mountain or that, this denomination or that, this church or that is not the only true right place to worship. The right place to worship is in spirit and truth.

Just as Maria struggled to grasp the spirit and the truth; needed to be shaken awake, God at various times needs to shake us free, so that we may be open to receive God's deeper life-giving waters.

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