

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today we heard two stories about thirst—one unfolded in the wilderness and the other beside a well. Both began with people who were tired, uncertain, and wondering whether God was still with them. And if we are honest, that feeling is not so far from the moment we are living in now.

Lately, the news has carried stories of war between the United States and Iran, along with the ripple effects spreading through global. Oil prices have jumped as the conflict disrupts shipping and raises fears about economic stability. Closer to home, immigration enforcement actions that filled headlines not long ago have faded from the front page, but not from people's lives. Communities are still living with the uncertainty of what might happen next. And the threats that enforcement could surge again in Chicago this spring have many holding their breath. The news cycle constantly moves on with something new to worry about. But our very real questions remain. And those questions sound a lot like the ones we heard in today's scriptures.

In Exodus, the Israelites wandered through the wilderness when panic began to rise. They were thirsty. They were tired. And before long they were accusing Moses and questioning God. They pleaded, saying, "give us water to drink." And while this is an important question in the desert, Danielle Shroyer suggests that it may have been covering up a deeper question. Something more like: "God... have you abandoned us?" You see, the

wilderness has a way of exposing our thirst. Sometimes the loud questions we ask—about security, stability, or the future—are really pointing toward a quieter question underneath. The question asking whether God is still with us.

Then the Gospel story took us to another place of thirst. A well outside a Samaritan town. Jesus had been traveling. He was tired. And he sat beside the well in the heat of the day when a Samaritan woman came to draw water. And he began the conversation with a simple question: “Will you give me a drink?” It is easy to miss how surprising that moment was. There, a Jewish rabbi spoke with a Samaritan woman. Jesus crossed cultural, religious, and social boundaries that people in that world took very seriously. But perhaps the most surprising thing of all is how Jesus interacted. He did not begin with a lecture. He did give a sermon. He simply asked, “Will you give me a drink?”

You might take a moment to glance at the image printed in the bulletin today. It is called *Living Water* by Lauren Wright Pittman. In the image, Jesus and the Samaritan woman mirror each other’s body positioning. The image is subtly divided in half by slight shifts in color that emphasize the chasm between them. In the background are the two disputed places of worship—Jerusalem’s temple and the Samaritan Mountain, Mount Gerizim. Yet, their eyes meet at the same plane. Their hands reach toward the same water. In the center where their arms overlap, a small blue drop appears with a dove.

The artist is reminding us that this story is not about one person having everything and the other receiving charity. Rather, it is about mutual need. Jesus needed water. The woman needed *living* water. And grace began to flow in the space between them. That moment of vulnerability opened the

door to a conversation that changed everything. Because the woman began asking questions too and eventually, she revealed the deepest longing of all, as she said, “Give me this water.”

Three questions shaped today’s encounter: the Israelites asked Moses for water, Jesus asked the woman for water, and the woman asked Jesus for living water. That’s because faith, it turns out, often grows through questions. And it’s fitting that our Lenten series focuses on “honest questions for deeper faith.” For, Lent is not a season for pretending we have everything figured out. Lent is a season for bringing our thirst to the well.

And notice that Jesus did not meet that woman’s questions with judgment. He met them with grace before she said a word. He spoke of living water—water that does more than quench thirst for a moment, water that becomes a spring of life. And the woman who arrived carrying the weight of her past left that place transformed. She ran back to her community and told them what she had experienced. That’s because living water flows outward. It does not stay contained.

Which brings us back to the questions we are asking now. Last week, almost a dozen people from this congregation gathered on Zoom to talk about something real. As immigration enforcement continues across the country and Chicago prepares for the possibility of increased activity again this spring, we asked a simple question: What can we do? The word that kept coming up was surprisingly simple: relationships. Building deeper relationships with our neighbors at San Timoteo and with our partners at La Trinidad is what we can do now. Not because we know exactly what the future holds, but because the gospel rarely begins with grand solutions. It

begins at a well where two people meeting in vulnerability. You see, sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is show up at the well to acknowledge that we are each baptized in Christ's living water. For, living water begins with relationship.

In many ways, that is the story of today's service as well. Today we welcome thirteen new members—individuals who once strangers and asked their own question: "Could *this* be *my* church?" And this community answered by opening the door. / So too, we are restoring the organ so future generations can gather and sing their questions of faith. / And we are working toward accessibility by asking together: Will you help create a place where living water flows for everyone?

You see, living water is not control. It is not certainty. Living water is grace. Living water is belonging. Living water is the surprising discovery that we need one another more than we realized. Today, we are reminded that the Israelites were thirsty in the wilderness. The Samaritan woman was thirsty at the well. And the truth that we are thirsty too.

So, as we continue our Lenten journey, we are reminded that Christ still meets us at the well. That Christ still freely offers living water to thirsty people like us. And that living water still flows wherever people are brave enough to need one another – and brave enough to share it. Amen.