

John 4:5-26

This woman's life was one disappointment after another. She had had five husbands, and five failed marriages. Her past is littered with poor decisions. And so is her present. There is another husband living with her, but it's not her husband; he's someone else's husband. She is a woman with a seedy past, a sinful present, and a bleak future. The kind of woman men ought to stay away from.

But here's Jesus sitting by the well as she arrives. He does not turn away from her. He engages with her in conversation. He knows her...her failed life, her active disobedience. He does not reject her. He has something to give to her - the gift of living water.

All of you have come here today to the same well as this woman; and Jesus is here to engage with you. He knows all of your disappointments in life; all your regrets...your failures. The poor choices you made in your past are not hidden from Him, nor are mine. Whether you are somewhat like this woman, or exactly like her, Jesus does not turn away from you. He is here to give you, also, the gift of living water.

Sitting by Jacob's well, He looks like a man who has nothing whatsoever to give. He is weary from His journey. He is hungry, and He is thirsty. He has no bucket with which to draw water. Jesus appears to be a man who needs to be given to; not someone who has anything to give.

The woman, in fact, is drawn into conversation with Him precisely for this reason. He asks her for a drink. Yet His thoughts are not on His needs, but on hers. As thirsty as Jesus is, this woman is more so. She is, in truth, dying of thirst. She comes daily with her bucket for water, but water only for this life; water for her body, not her soul.

Jesus has living water to give her. That word *living* is to be translated, "flowing, active, water that does something within the one who drinks it." This living water is the Holy Spirit. He is active and flowing within the hearts and lives of those who drink Him. The Holy Spirit does not sit like stagnant water. He is always moving, working, giving life - for He is *living* water.

We know how to drink water. We use our mouth. There is no other way in which we can drink water. Living water can only be drunk with our ears. There is no other way. The words of Jesus are living water in our ears, for through His words is given the Holy Spirit.

"*You have had five husbands,*" Jesus tells the woman. He confronts her with her seedy past. "*The husband you now have is not your husband.*" He exposes her present, active disobedience. This word of accusation in her ears is living water. It is a gift of God to open up old wounds, and new ones, so they can be cleansed of their infection.

I'm no prophet. It is not for me to go digging into your past. But if there are infectious wounds there which are covered over by excuses and whatnot, it is God's business. The Holy Spirit's work is to confront us, to expose our lies, to strip away our excuses, to convict us so that we repent.

Repentance is a gift - a gift the Holy Spirit works in all who believe. To stew in life over our failures and disappointments is to be stale, stagnant water...dead water. But the Holy Spirit is living water. He flows within us to open our sinful wounds so that they are cleansed and we move forward in life forgiven and renewed.

This woman had five husbands. Here at the well, she is conversing with husband number six. Jesus is her true husband; not carnally, but spiritually. This is why He is there - to seek her, His beloved bride. This is why He does not turn away from her. He engages with her as a loving husband tenderly embraces his wife.

He is no mere prophet. He is the Messiah - the One pointed to by all the prophets. He does not just embrace this woman; He embraces her past. He makes it His own.

And so with you. Jesus is not here engaging with you to point out your failures and tell you to do better. He makes your failures His failures. He takes your sins and makes them His. The ugly wounds the Holy Spirit opens in you invade Jesus' body. He hangs on the cross exposed, stripped, a mockery to all, because your shameful sins, and mine, are now His own. They glare forth from His dying flesh for all the world to see.

So your past is not seedy anymore. There is no shame there. There is no guilt lurking there. Jesus took all of it from all of you. Your past is cleansed. Your present is forgiven. Your future is bright.

Do you have any doubts? Look at your Baptism. There is the living water in which you live each day. It never leaves you. Your Baptism is not stagnant. It flows within you. The Holy Spirit is at work to give more and more of Jesus to you; to renew your faith; to keep cleansing you; to well up in you eternal life - the life you are given in Christ.

We know, from the verses following our text, that the living water Jesus was giving the woman flowed through her to others. Many of the people in her town believed in Jesus because of her. That's the thing about living water. It doesn't just sit there. It works within you. It moves through you to others.

There are people in your life...some very dear to you, who are stagnant. They are not moving forward in Christ. They may have been sprinkled with the living water of Baptism, but right now they are dead in the water, needing the words of Christ in their ears, needing the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives.

They may have a seedy past, like the woman. They may even be living now in active disobedience. So was the woman at the well. But Jesus embraced her. He forgave her. And through her, living water flowed throughout her village. That same living water is here flowing in you today; and by God's grace, will flow through you to others, so that in your house and village many will drink and have new life in Christ. Amen.