

Lent 3, March 8, 2026
Nativity Lutheran Church, Weeki Wachee, Florida
John 4:5-42
Rev. Dr. Carolyn Schneider

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I bring you greetings from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana, with which your Florida-Bahamas Synod has a partnership. I have been called there by our national church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to help the Lutheran church in Guyana address its severe shortage of lay leaders, deacons and pastors by strengthening its Lutheran Lay Academy, something similar to the Lay Academy of the FBS. I will say more about that work in the presentation following worship, which you are invited to attend.

Guyana has something important in common with Florida: abundant water. They tell me that the word Guyana is from the indigenous Arawak language and means something like “waterland”. It is an appropriate name, as Guyana sits on the northeastern coast of South America, where three great rivers meet the Atlantic Ocean. Frequent rain there means that the streets of every town are lined with trenches to capture the water and prevent flooding, and the interior of the country is a big and beautiful rainforest.

It’s not a land thirsting for natural water, the kind we drink every day, bathe in, and irrigate with. But, like every land, even Florida, it is a place where people thirst for the kind of water that Jesus talks about in our gospel reading, as he has a conversation with a Samaritan woman near the ancient well that their ancestor Jacob built.

This conversation can be a little bit difficult to follow without a basic introduction to the history of the Samaritans, so I will give a brief version of some of that history, beginning about 1,000 years before Jesus was born. At that time, the families that had descended from Abraham were living as one nation under one king. But tensions and conflicts between them caused that kingdom to split into two opposing kingdoms, one in the south and one in the north.

The southern kingdom was called the kingdom of Judah, which is why its people came to be called “Jews”. It was much smaller than the northern kingdom, and its capital city was Jerusalem, where there was a grand temple for the people to worship God. The northern kingdom was called the kingdom of Israel. It was much bigger than the kingdom of Judah, and its capital city was Samaria, which is why its people came to be called “Samaritans”. The Samaritans built their own temple for God on Mt. Gerizim, where Abraham’s grandson Jacob had built a well, and where Jesus would later meet the Samaritan woman.

Even though the people of both kingdoms were all descendants of Abraham, worshiped the same God, and studied the same holy books to learn God’s laws, the relationship between them was very sour, as it can be sometimes in a family. This sour relationship was expressed in distrust, fear, rivalry, and sometimes even in war. But in both kingdoms, there were prophets, people who reflected deeply on God’s Word and spoke out, saying that this hatred and division was not what God wanted or intended; therefore, God would destroy both kingdoms and both temples, in order to make something new, God’s own kingdom, where all the broken relationships would be healed. Faithful people in both kingdoms looked ahead to a Messiah, someone chosen by God to bring them into this united kingdom of God.

These words of the prophets would come true. By the time Jesus was born, both the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel had been destroyed, and the whole region was ruled by a foreign power, the Roman Empire. But the ancient bad feelings between Jews and Samaritans still remained. That is why the Samaritan woman was so surprised to see Jesus, a Jewish man, sitting at Jacob’s well near her Samaritan village, and asking her for a drink of water.

Jesus uses that encounter to reveal to the Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah she has been waiting for, and he leads her and her whole Samaritan village to faith and brings them into the kingdom of God. Jesus begins by saying that, while the woman can give him water from Jacob’s well, he can give her living water as a gift from God that will flow eternally in her so that she will never need more.

The woman says, “Sir, give me this water!” Who wouldn’t want such water? Even in Guyana, the land of many waters, the flow of water from the municipal pipes into the houses is on and off. The woman

thinks Jesus is talking about the physical water that we drink every day, so Jesus has to help her understand that he is talking about a different kind of water, a water that brings a person's dried-out spirit to life. In order to do that, Jesus is going to have to touch her aching spirit just where it hurts. So, he asks her to go get her husband. She says, "I have no husband," and Jesus responds, "That is true; you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband." We don't know what happened, whether the woman had experienced a string of divorces or her husbands had died, one after another, or what. But whatever happened, it cannot have been a happy story. By touching her sore spot, Jesus made the woman see that he was a prophet, because that is what prophets do. They bring God to the hard, dry places of our lives to show us how much we need a Savior to give us the water that will give life to our spirits.

So now the Samaritan woman wanted to talk to Jesus about God. Maybe she wanted to know where God had been in her life. It is a question many people ask when their lives have been hard. She asks Jesus where God comes to us. Does God come here to this mountain where I live, she asks, or does God come only to the temple in Jerusalem, where I am not welcome?

Jesus answers that God's coming to us does not depend on where we are geographically, and in fact, by the time John's gospel was written, both the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim and the Jewish temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. Instead, Jesus tells her, God comes to us wherever we are, and in a way that can never be destroyed. Jesus is talking about himself. Later in the Bible, in the book of Revelation, there is a description of the city of God, in which there is no temple because Jesus himself is its temple, and from him flows the river of the water of life that heals the nations and makes the trees bear endless fruit. Jesus is where God meets us. That is what Jesus tells the Samaritan woman when she says that she knows a Messiah is coming who will explain all these things about God. Jesus says, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." I am right now bringing God to you in spirit and in truth.

Jesus is the temple that cannot be destroyed. Even though he was killed, he was raised again in glory never to die again. The risen Jesus comes to us wherever we are and speaks to us the same words that he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. He meets us at the well that we call the baptismal font, where he pours living water over us. He meets us in the words of the Bible to refresh our spirits with that

living water. He is the Savior of the world who gives us the bread and wine that are his body and blood so that we might share his life.

We have come here today to meet him, bringing with us some parts of our lives where Jesus' living water has not yet reached. So, we ask him to give us that water. There is still bitterness in our relationships with others, even in our families, just as there was between Samaritans and Jews in the first century. Sometimes in our lives, as in theirs, that bitterness goes way back. Not only that, but also some of our relationships have caused pain and confusion in our lives, just as the Samaritan woman experienced. We can tell Jesus the truth about all of that, as she did. Jesus knows it anyway, and he has come to touch those places where our spirits remain dry and thirsty so that his living water can wash, cleanse, heal and bring even those dead spots to life.

When the Samaritan woman experiences this, she is so overcome with hope that she forgets about the well water and leaves her water jug there while she runs back to her village to tell everyone that a prophet has come who knows everything about her and still says that God has come looking for her to give her his Spirit and bring her into God's new kingdom. He is calling all of them, too, she says. Could he be the Messiah?

In the meantime, Jesus himself is overcome with joy because the Holy Spirit is irrigating the seeds he is sowing so that they are sprouting rapidly. Maybe he is remembering the prophet Amos, who had preached centuries ago in Samaria, saying, "The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps" (Amos 9:13); in other words, those who sow the seeds and those who reap the harvest will be working at the same time because the plants are springing up so quickly. That hour has arrived, Jesus says, as he points his disciples to the approaching Samaritan villagers. "Look, the fields are ripe for harvesting." The little well-watered seedling of faith that the woman brought back to her village is already bearing fruit.

The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them for a while so that they could listen to him, and he and his disciples stayed there for two days. When the villagers experienced Jesus for themselves, 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.”

Jesus asks his disciples to follow the Samaritan woman’s example as she gathers her people into the kingdom of God. She is a role model for us also, whose lives have been filled with the living water that Jesus gives. We, too, can bring this water back with us to the villages where we live and share it with others whose spirits may be thirsty. This will mean spending some time with people, even people that we haven’t been friends with before, engaging them in deep conversation about their lives, letting Jesus’ living water soothe their sore spots, raising up questions and new possibilities for them. Then, the people that we connect with Jesus might join the Samaritans in saying to us, “We know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” When that happens, we may thank God together for this gift of life, and worship him together in spirit and in truth.