

## **The Woman at the Well**

*Rev. John Allen*

I expect that during the last few days you have been heading out into the world to try to find the things that you and your family need. Stocking up on food, cleaning supplies, and yes, toilet paper.

You have seen bare shelves, braved long lines, and learned that any job can become an essential front-line vocation in an emergency, even a grocery bagger.

I hope you found most of what you sought. I am sure there are probably a few things you are missing. A couple things that give you a little pang of anxiety when you wonder how you will make it last.

And now you are at home. Perhaps with the service up on a tv, or huddled over your laptop, or even watching on your phone.

You have been washing your hands for twenty seconds with warm water.

Covering your cough with your elbow.

Keeping distance from others.

Avoiding crowds.

Making plans for work, the kids...

And hitting refresh on news and social media probably a bit more than you need to.

In this moment we are perched on the edge of something that is likely to be even more trying. We are watching and waiting for things to get worse, before they get better. There is something hanging over the world that feels heavy and thick.

And we are not quite sure what to think, or how to feel.

I only remember one other time feeling this way. Molli and I lived in New York during Hurricane Sandy. And there was this day when the subways were shut down, the stores were shuttered, everyone was charging their phones, filling bottles and bathtubs with water, checking and rechecking the flashlights. There was an enormous storm spinning off shore, we hadn't really felt it yet, but no one doubted it was there.

And it got quite a bit worse, before it got any better.

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Jesus broke away from his disciples one afternoon to stop by a well in Samaria, and there he met a woman, who had come to draw water in the heat of the noon sun.

She was quite confused when he asked her for a drink of water.

First because he was a Jew. His people and hers had a violent feud that stretched back generations and was very much alive.

And second because he seemed to have come to the water without a bucket.

And it doesn't get any less confusing from there. Jesus starts talking about something called "living water." And then he says this:

'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

And she replies, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

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The water that Jesus gives us becomes within us a spring of water, rushing, gushing, up to eternity.

Never ending. Never failing. Never running dry.

God has placed in each of our hearts a font of living water that never runs dry. Bubbling up eternally.

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I bet that dried beans and paper towels are not the only thing you are afraid you will run out of.

Somewhere deep down, or maybe right on the surface, each of us has to be wondering if we have what it takes to weather what is coming. If we have the courage, the patience, the stamina.

If we will be able to keep our heads if fear takes hold. If we will be able to find the courage to remember our responsibilities to our neighbors and our community when we are tempted to only look out for those beneath our own roof.

I believe the answer is yes. Because though our faith God has set a spring in our spirits that will never run dry.

Courage is not like groceries.

Resilience is not like cleaning supplies.

It is the great news that the woman at the well was thrilled to hear. You don't have to go out to draw more of this water. It is already right where you need it.

None of us will live perfectly in the days and weeks ahead. Nor does God need or expect us to. But God has placed in our hearts what we need in order to live well in these days. God has imbued us with what we need for the facing of this hour. The human heart contains the reflexes and instincts even for what feels so unfamiliar to our minds, and the human spirit holds the courage and resilience we need to carry community through such uncertainty.

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Things are worse in Italy than they have gotten here. People are sheltered in their homes, not able to even walk out their own apartment doors. But all over the country people have been opening their windows and singing, beautiful harmonies echoing down ancient cobblestoned streets.

Human community holds the instincts for this. God has placed in our hearts that well that springs up eternally. Its in us. We have it in us.

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Most of us have lived most days of our life like the Samaritan Woman. Setting out each day with an empty bucket expecting that it can only be filled by our own wearying labor.

We hardly ever touch that deep living water, because we don't need it. We can provide for ourselves, we can more or less shape our day, and even bend our lives to our liking.

And sometimes it takes all of that beginning to give way for us to realize the power of God planted in within us.

That uneasy feeling in the pit of our stomachs now is the feeling of our sense of certainty and control being wrested away from us. It is many of us being acquainted, for the first time in our lives, with a kind of uncertainty and fear that was ordinary for our ancestors.

But the good news that I have for you is that beneath that lies an ever-flowing spring of God, courage, grace, and love. In the days and weeks ahead we will need to draw from those waters, perhaps as never before.

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In the year 166, only a couple generations after Jesus died, a plague struck the Roman Empire. The Antonine Plague, as it would come to be known lasted twenty years and killed about a quarter of the population of the Roman Empire.

The years that followed that plague also saw one of the most considerable growth spurts of the early christian church. Converts to the fledgeling faith grew exponentially for the first time in history.

And historians point to a single reason why.

Because as the plague swept across the empire, many people became immensely fearful, self-protective, many fled cities as the disease spread, abandoned communities to save themselves.

But all over the empire, there was one group that could be found reliably beside the dying, caring for communities in chaos. Christians.

They doing then, what remains the most effective evangelism today. Living lives that made the abstract love of God, quite real, in simple, brave, acts of service and care. Then, and now, the lives of the faithful proclaim the gospel more eloquently than any sermon.

You, and how you live, in ordinary times, but especially in extraordinary times. You, and what you do now, is what will make the truth of God's love believable to a world that frankly isn't so sure.

Its a lot to put on our shoulders, I know. We only just now got pantry stocked.

I pray that this outbreak will be curtailed somewhat by the rather dramatic acts of distancing that we have all nearly uniformly undertaken. But I still expect that there will be some trying days ahead.

If they come, we will all take a breath together, we will find that deep well, the well that our ancestors have come to before us, the one that never runs dry, the one that God has dug in our hearts for such a time as this.

And we will do what we have always been called to do.

We will bring God's love to life.

