



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 3

March 8, 2026

Deep Need

John 4:5–26

⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

¹¹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?" ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."



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²⁶ *Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."*

There are many things in life that we want, but don't actually need: a new car, when a used one will do; the latest cell phone, when your current one is just fine; a large order of fries, when a small would be more than sufficient. These are just a few of the items people think they need, but they really don't.

But you do have a need – a deep need – even though you may not be aware of it: it's the thirst of your soul for God's righteousness and forgiveness. We don't naturally realize we have this need. We don't *feel* spiritually thirsty. God has to use His special means to make us aware of our soul's dehydrated condition.

So, in today's Gospel, Jesus makes this Samaritan woman thirsty for the "Living Water." He says, "Whoever drinks of this plain ordinary water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Wouldn't it be nice if that were true? It would be great – wouldn't it? – if there were a drink that could quench all your troubles, calm all your fears, strengthen all the weaknesses in your life, with one delicious gulp? Do you suppose something like that could actually exist?

Well, it depends. If you're thinking of some kind of spiritual soda pop that would sooth all your pains and satisfy all your earthly appetites, then no, it doesn't exist. But that's not the kind of "living water" Jesus promises.

However, if you're thinking of a drink that can satisfy all your guilt over sins, and quench your worries about God's wrath and punishment, that would refresh you with the promise of eternal joy with your Lord in heaven, then yes, there really *is* such a water. *That's* what Jesus was promising the Samaritan woman.

It wasn't a water that would keep her from going to the well every day and generally make her life easier; it was a *spiritual* water – a washing of the Holy Spirit – a water that would completely *change* her, and make her a child of God.

Jesus had to awaken her desire for this living water because she only perceived her earthly, day-to-day needs. She thought she needed water only for cooking, cleaning, and drinking; she couldn't conceive of the *living* water Jesus was offering her. How foolish and short-sighted she was!

But are we any different? Don't we tend to see our needs the way she did? Our need for a paycheck may loom larger than our need for forgiveness. A peaceful weekend may seem more precious than the peace of God that passes understanding. Our lunch and dinner tables look more inviting, and more nutritious, than the Lord's Table. Our recreational life – fishing, golfing, and so on – may have a higher priority than our worship life.



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So today, Jesus wants to make us aware of our deep, eternal need for "living water." Many of us are spiritually dehydrated, but we don't know it.

I'm told that soldiers training for desert warfare are each given 2 canteens, and told to drink at least 10 of them a day. They're instructed: "Every time you stop, take a drink; every time you start off, take a drink; every 10 minutes, take a drink."

The reason it's stressed so much is that they rarely *feel* thirsty, even though the temperatures can reach 110 degrees or more. The air's so dry that their sweat evaporates before they even know they're sweating. The rule of thumb is this: **WHETHER YOU FEEL THIRSTY OR NOT, PRESUME YOU'RE THIRSTY.**

The same rule of thumb ought to apply to our spiritual thirst: **WHETHER YOU FEEL SPIRITUALLY THIRSTY OR NOT, PRESUME YOU'RE THIRSTY.** It doesn't matter how much you *think* you need God's forgiveness; the truth is, you need it desperately and constantly.

The whole world is in dire need of the "living water" of God, even though most people today don't feel a thirst for it. They'll go on trudging through the deserts of life until they finally collapse and end up in the heat of hell. They'll continually ignore the canteens of "living water" available to them in God's Word and Sacraments because they don't feel thirsty for God's living water.

At times we, too, may go wandering off through the desert, and become spiritually parched and on the verge of collapse, until God rescues us again, first, by showing us our thirst – the commandments we haven't kept, the love for God and our neighbor we haven't shown, the perfect life we haven't lived, all the things that demonstrate our shriveled spiritual condition.

Then He fills us up with His "living water," strengthening our faith in Christ. Through the good news of the Gospel, through His Holy Sacraments, He re-hydrates our thirsty souls by the power of the Holy Spirit.

By giving this "living water" to the woman at the well, and to each of us, Jesus gives us what our souls need most, and what we'll surely die forever without.

So, what *is* it, exactly, this living water? And why do we need it? Listen to what Jesus says in John 7(:38): "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John goes on to explain that "This He spoke concerning the Holy Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive." The living water, then, is, quite simply, the Holy Spirit.

So, **WHY DO WE NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT?** First of all, like our bodies need water to live, our souls need the Holy Spirit to live. As water is necessary for our body's ability to digest food, so the Holy Spirit is necessary for our soul's digestion of God's Word and Sacraments.

You can't comprehend the Word of God without the help of the Holy Spirit. The



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Sacraments would do you no good without the Spirit working in them. By faith, the Holy Spirit delivers to our souls the nutrients they need to survive, which are the forgiveness and righteousness of Christ.

Secondly, water is necessary in our bodies for our blood to be CLEANSED and for the elimination of harmful wastes. So also the "Living Water," the Holy Spirit, is necessary to cleanse our souls and to eliminate the harmful wastes of our old nature. Paul says in Romans 6 that in baptism "our old self was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be done away with, and that we should no longer be slaves of sin." In baptism, *Christ's* death becomes *our* death, and *Christ's life* becomes *our* life. The Holy Spirit works in that baptism daily to rid us of our old sinful habits, and to make our lives conform more and more to the life of Christ.

Finally, water is necessary for our bodies to BREATHE. Without moisture in our lungs, oxygen couldn't be exchanged. The Holy Spirit is likewise necessary for PRAYER, often called the "VITAL BREATH" of the Christian. As Paul says in Romans 8: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.... He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

When you don't know what to pray for, when you don't even realize what you need, the Spirit is automatically breathing for you before the throne of God to keep your faith in Christ alive, and to keep your needs before the Father in heaven.

Without the "Living water" of the Holy Spirit, our faith would quickly suffocate, our souls would shrivel up and die. Without the "Living water" of the Holy Spirit, there simply is no spiritual life.

Thank God He promises to give us His Spirit freely, without our preparation or our working for Him. While we were yet dead in our trespasses and sins, Christ revived us with this "Living Water."

Through Baptism, through the promise of the Gospel, through the Lord's body and blood, we're given the "living water" that springs up to everlasting life. With His "Living Water," Christ gives us every spiritual blessing.

So, may the free gift of the "Living Water" of the Holy Spirit ever flow through you from Christ. For this "living water" is your greatest need, today and always. It's also your greatest gift, flowing freely from God to you through the Means of Grace. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen