Trust in the Eternal Flow of God's Love

Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn for St. John's Episcopal Church
The Third Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2026: John 4:5-42, Exodus 17:1-17

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is tired out from a long journey on foot from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, and stopping in the in-between territory of Samaria, he asks a Samaritan woman for a drink from their well. This conversation violates long-standing social taboos about Jews and Samaritans having anything to do with one another, and about men and women conversing with one another as equals. But in typical Jesus fashion, he refuses to implicitly endorse either taboo or the oppression that goes with them and instead has a long conversation with the woman at the well whose name is not mentioned in the Bible. Eastern Christians call her "Photini," which means "illuminated one," or "enlightened one," and revere her as a martyr of the Roman Emperor Nero.[1]

Jesus is thirsty. He does not have a bucket so cannot get the water in the well unless someone helps him. The Samaritan woman does help him and in the process of their conversation, he says something that stood out to me. "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Have you all ever seen a spring? There is one on West River Parkway that runs all year, even in the winter, sometimes flowing so strongly that you can see a wet patch on the road from the hill west of the road running across to the river. There is a spring in Eden Prairie called the Fredrick-Miller Spring that you can get access to all year as well. Water comes up from deep in the earth and flows perpetually, providing an endless source.

There are two ways to have enough resources in this world. The first is the one our culture normally uses, which is to try to store enough so that you never run out. We have water towers and reservoirs, we have bank accounts and IRAs and investments, we try to save for a rainy day, as it were. But the second way to have enough is to be a hollow bone, a place where the endlessness of God's abundant world can flow through you without clinging to it or trying to hoard or save it or stop the flow. Jesus is saying that he is offering an internal access point to the vastness of the reservoir of the love of God, the living water of the Spirit of God, which is a spring that never runs dry.

In today's world, it is easy to come to the end of our own reserves. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, many people are running on empty. Those who were forced to shelter in place because of the occupation by ICE of our city were not able to work for weeks and were already living paycheck to paycheck, and rent was due a week ago, so

[1] See "St Photini, the Samaritan Woman - Patron Saint of OCL," accessed March 8, 2026 at https://ocl.org/orthodox-christian-laity/st-photini-patron-saint-of-ocl/

people have been organizing to support them financially. Many people have given all they can and continue to give all they can to support. But it's easy to come to the end of one's personal resources. It's easy to come to the end of one's resources emotionally and spiritually too. Where do we get the ability to stay grounded, centered, aligned, and connected with the love of God?

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is saying that he is offering this freely, as a gift. Love is the one thing that grows the more you give it away. If we become willing to relinquish control and instead receive the vast abundance of the presence of God and allow it to flow through us, like a hollow bone or a flute that air flows through producing beautiful music, we can experience the spring of living water flowing through us.

This week, a good friend of mine about my age became suddenly very sick while on vacation in Arizona. She went to the emergency room and they discovered a bowel obstruction that was caused by a mass, which they removed with surgery, but she had developed sepsis. For the last several days she has been in critical condition, intubated and unconscious, and the doctors have said that she might not recover. I have been praying without ceasing for her. In some ways my friend experiencing sepsis reminds me of what all of us are dealing with in our world today. There are times the toxins and oppression in our city and our nation are so many and so endless that it feels impossible to clear one assault before the next begins.

But I know in my bones that we are made of light, of the divine image of God that is the truest thing about us, all of us, without exception. I have been praying for my friend that light well up in each of her cells, like the living water Jesus describes is available to all of us freely, as a gift, gushing up within us to eternal life. I have been praying for my friend's truest and highest good. That her body would be connected with light and love and the ability to clear the toxins from her blood. Last night I heard she had turned a corner and they were beginning to wean her off sedation. We don't know yet if she is fully out of the woods or if she will recover or what the long-term implications might be. But I know that I ran up against the limits of my ability to accomplish anything except pray. And I did pray. And even though prayer isn't like dropping a coin into a candy machine and getting something from it, I do believe that we can become conduits for the love of God, for the vast mystery of the will of God for life and liberation and healing, and that this can pour through us without us having to manufacture these things on our own. We can actually trust the love of God and receive it as a gift and pass it along. We can trust that we don't have to white-knuckle our way through life, but instead return to the spring of the power of God and drink deeply whenever we are thirsty, world without end. The love of God flowing through us doesn't mean we can avoid loss or suffering or pain. It is not a guarantee of the safety or healing of the people we pray for. But it is a balm in Gilead, a source of endless peace and love and light that makes a difference in this world.

What is happening in the world today is beyond any of our capacity to fix or solve on our own. That doesn't mean we can ignore it or give up in despair. It means we need to become connected in a real way with the source of all life, with the energy of God's love, and allow it to flow through us without trying to hoard it or control it or possess it. In today's reading from Exodus the people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years and every single day, they received just enough manna from God for that day alone. If they tried to gather more than they needed the manna went rancid. When they ran out of water in the vast heat of the desert, again and again, they asked God for help and God supplied water for them – just enough.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet says this:

> Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters: and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? . . . Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them seek the Lord and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. … As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. *Isaiah 55:1-2, 6-11*

In the end, what we need to become conduits of the love of God instead of hoarders of it is trust. Trust that the love of God is vast and unconditional and endless and available to us to be experienced and passed along. Trust that we can accept the gift of God in Christ of living water that can well up within us like a spring that never runs dry. Trust that we can truly come to God, and freely receive water and bread and milk and wine without money and without cost. That we can cease our endless striving and over-efforting and trying to make everything happen on our own without being connected to the source of all.

What do you need to be able to trust that God's love is available to you endlessly, to flow through you? If you'd be willing, imagine for a moment that you are a hollow bone, a reed, a flute. Imagine that there is a spring of water that is alive and clear and full of light and love and the very presence of the Spirit of God. Imagine that all you have to do is say yes, and ask for the water to flow through you. I cannot give you this experience. But I know that it is available to all of us. I know that it can transform lives of despair and fear and emptiness to lives that have purpose and flow and energy and meaning. It is greater than we are. The love of God is greater than we are. May it flow through us without ceasing. **Amen.**