

## **“The Well of Life”**

**John 4:5-42**

**Rev. Debbie Gara**

**February 24, 2008**

*Note: (a 12 minute DVD “Lump”, by Rob Bell precedes this message)*

*Lump is the moving story of a young boy of about 5 or 6 and his family. The boy is ‘caught’ having taken a small white ball from a neighbor’s house. In his shame he hides under a blanket in the middle of his parent’s bed for over 2 hours. His father come in, uncovers him, and pulls him to his lap in an embrace, saying, over and over, “There is nothing you could ever do to make me love you less.”*

**"Rob" Bell** is an author, Christian speaker, and the founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church located in Grandville, Michigan. He is also the creator and featured speaker in a series of spiritual short films called NOOMA. In the Greek language, pneuma is breath, or spirit. The spirit of God, the spirit of life. One of our adult Sunday School classes, Spiritseekers has been experiencing many of these short films and will be continuing to share more.

For me, one of the most beautiful and significant things about this story is that there is a loving father intent on finding his beloved child, pulling down the covers to share the gentle and powerful message of grace, forgiveness. And the child, who trusts this loving father from past experiences, while still ridden with shame, allows this message to penetrate so that healing and growth can occur.

It seems to me that we are often quite proficient at moving through life in fairly significant and influential ways, while deep inside a large part of us is curled up under a blanket, still terrified of being discovered. For there are the times in life that we have been hurt, times in life that we been the cause of hurt, times we have received messages from one who had power and

authority. Messages that we were *not* loved unconditionally or we were not *good* enough in some way. Perhaps there was not one to search us, pull back the cover and hold us while we sobbed. In fact, sometimes we are so curled up that the tears never reach their outlet. And so, the cover has remained, and God's message of complete grace and forgiveness is one that seems suitable for others more worthy. Our comfort may come in other ways... effective, for a time, and sometimes destructive, as we find greater ways to mask the pain.

And just as Rob the loving father brought the message of the living Christ, the living

Christ comes to us once again today in the scripture about the Samaritan women at the well. An extraordinary passage abundant with the overflowing grace of Jesus the living God. Most Jews would try to avoid contact with Samaritans because they were considered outsiders. Although Jews and Samaritans shared the Pentateuch as Scripture, Samaritans claimed Mt. Gerizim as the location of the cultic center, not Jerusalem. Passing through Samaria was the shortest route between Judea and Galilee and we hear in Verse 4 that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria; Jesus flaunts conventional practice by choosing that route, not a geographical necessity, but a theological statement, an action of God's love for the world. Jesus' own disciples misunderstand him in this act.

And to ask her for a drink? Unheard of. From an unclean woman? A despicable act. Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans! The woman's response to Jesus' request for water, "You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?" highlights Jesus' breach of societal conventions.

Jesus has violated social convention in conversing with the woman, and doing it alone, let alone a Samaritan woman full of sin, for we know that she has married multiple times, and is in a non-full-filling, non-satisfying cycle of filling and emptying water jars. It was noon, in the heat of the day, a time when she could go alone and un-noticed in her shame. But Jesus is not concerned with judging the woman and her history! Instead we are provided with another example of Jesus' ability to see and know all things,

One of the most compelling images of this passage is of the living water. As people in a world that still thirsts for spiritual renewal, today's scripture offers a beautiful vision of hope—a vision that can be seen, heard, and felt. To the ancient Israelites, to the Samaritan woman, and even to us, God offers the gift of living water.

Like Nicodemus' confusion in last week's passage, the women interprets living water literally as "spring water" (as opposed to water from a cistern) but Jesus speaks metaphorically of "water of life", and those who drink it will never be thirsty again.

Jesus responds to her awareness of a coming Messiah who will proclaim all things... "I am he" This is the characteristic formula of self-revelation in John. Many times the "I am" is followed by a noun: "I am the bread of life" "I am the light of the world" "I am the good shepherd" "I am the resurrection and the life" "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" "I am the

true vine” When Jesus speaks this way, he is making a direct connection with the divine name in order to identify himself as the one in whom God is visible and made known; the one who meets basic needs and desires The basic need and desire to feel worthy, to feel the abundance of God’s love in our creation, and to give.

The women’s faith is enough to allow her to move to confession and then to witness. She returned to the city and told them of the one who had known her fully, asking the question, “He cannot be the Messiah, can he? Perhaps in her own feeling of unworthiness, she would only allow herself to entertain the idea, but her witness was powerful enough that the people were led to Jesus on the basis of her testimony, and their own experience of Jesus then lead to faith.

The further message of God’s life giving love is that *as* we trust, believe, and accept God’s gift, as we allow the covers to be pulled down and enter God’s embrace, our action is to give that love to others, to witness, to be disciples for Christ in the world. We will receive abundant blessings as we act out of God’s love, but our receiving is not a relevant awareness. Our giving is a part of our being as we embrace the living waters of Christ.

This is our call as individuals, and this is our call as the church. To ***Dynamic Worship, to be an Inviting Community, engaged in Spiritual Discipleship, Witness and Service;*** to continue to find ways to ***Believe Belong and Become*** so that all might experience the living waters of Christ.

God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Our history, our shortcomings, our failings.  
God knows of our great need, the depth of our thirst.  
Even when we are too ashamed to admit our need,  
God offers the sustenance of love.  
Showering us with the living water that refreshes our souls,  
and quenching our thirst.

The water that Jesus gives is superior to all other water, because it is a source of eternal life. And the living water of God's love gushes out in a river that is abundant enough for everyone: The Samaritan women; the confused disciples; anxious youth; overworked teachers; the lonely and grieving; the stressed-out professionals; the homeless alcoholics; the single parents; those who fear; those who fear change or are threatened by new ways of being, the victims of injustice, of poverty, abuse...oh God may we find the ways to bring the healing waters to those who need it most immediately!

The living water of God's love  
gushes out for all.  
For me, and for you...

And there is **NOTHING** you could ever do to make God love you less...

Thanks be to God.

Benediction (John 4)

Go out and join the river of God's love.  
Go out and carry Christ's living water to the world.  
Go out and be sustained and nurtured  
by the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit.

Go out to a thirsty world  
and offer the spring of water  
gushing up to eternal life. Amen.