

“Living Waters”  
Based on John 3: 4: 5-42  
by Rev. Meghan Davis  
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First of, let me set one thing straight. I am not a prostitute. Yes, it is true, I have lived with five different men and I was not married to every one of them, but I had very little power over the situation. When my husband died I had nowhere to go. I had no one to rely on. I was at the mercy of any man who would have me. I was essentially the property of any man who would have me. And as such, I made out pretty well. I was lucky that most of the men treated me fairly well. For a while, at least. But eventually they would tire of me. I could always tell when my time was nearing an end. He'd start getting mean. Food would get more and more meager. And before long, I was out the door. Looking for someone new to take me in.

It is true that though I had little control over my situation, I was looked down on by many. It's interesting how those on the losing side of an oppressive society willingly uphold it as long as they are doing relatively well in that society. Married women, with the benefit of husband and family treated me as inferior even though I had done nothing to earn my bad luck of a bad situation. And they had done nothing to earn their good luck of a good situation.

And so, I never enjoyed leaving the house to go to the well or for any other purpose. I felt the eyes of scorn on me as I walked through town. Often, words of scorn accompanied the looks. Often times I would go to the well at the hottest part of the day, when the least people would be there. Fewer looks. Fewer unkind words. And that is what I did that day. It was so hot. I was both relieved by the heat, knowing there would be no one at the well, and dreading going out into it myself. As I got closer to the well, I saw that there was a man there and considered turning around and going home. But knowing how desperately we needed water, I went ahead and approached. I realized that he was a stranger, not from our town and since he wouldn't know anything about me, I had the comfort of knowing he would have no harsh words for me.

When he did talk to me, all my worries and thoughts of myself disappeared. He simply said, “Give me a drink.” I was shocked. How...? What...? You see, as soon as he spoke, I knew that he was from Galilee, a Jew. In what world would a Jewish man ask to share water with a Samaritan woman? And when I asked him, he said something that I didn't really understand. He said, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” I wasn't sure what he was saying, but he *seemed* to be saying that *I* should be asking *him* for water. For *living water*. Well, I didn't know what that meant, but I liked the sound of it. Living water is surely better than the water from this well. I thought for a minute. He seemed like the kind of man you didn't want to speak to without thinking. I wanted to know, is he talking about regular water like from this well, or is he talking about something else? I asked, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” When he responded, “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.” Do you ever get a sense of something though you

don't quite know why or what? Do you ever get a feeling about something? Well, that's how I felt. I just knew that there was something special about this man. I knew that the living waters he was talking about was something special. I knew that the gushing water up to eternal life was something I wanted. But I still didn't know exactly what it was. Could it be that somehow, by some wonderful work of God, that I would never have to face the pain and humiliation of coming to this well again? I implored him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

He said, "Go, call your husband, and come back." What did my husband have to do with it? Was he going to give my husband the living water but not me? Not that it mattered because I don't have a husband. I told him so. And I couldn't believe when he said, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband' for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" How would he know this about me? But even more striking was the fact that he knew this about me and he continued to talk to me. And not only did he continue to talk to me, but he did so without a hint of judgment or disdain. He spoke to me with respect that I don't know anyone, especially a man, ever used with me. It was clear, this man is a prophet.

So I took the opportunity to ask him a question that had always bothered me. You see, Samaritans and Jews hold basically the same religious beliefs. We worship the same One God. We follow most of the same traditions with a few differences. Yet they don't recognize us as Jewish and they think we are somehow "less than." So I asked, "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." His response was not as straightforward as I had hoped. He said, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Again, I wasn't sure exactly what it all meant, but it sounded wonderful. It sounded like all our religious differences could be set aside and we will all worship the One True God as one. In an attempt to assure him that I understood I said, "I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." And then he said the most amazing thing of all. He said, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then a group of men came. I supposed they were his friends, but later I learned they were his disciples. I could tell they were astonished that he was speaking with a woman. Their faces said what their mouths did not, "What do you want woman?" "Why are you speaking with her?" But I didn't have time to worry about them. I just met the Messiah, the Christ. I left my water jar and went back to the city. I told everyone I saw, everyone who would listen, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" Well, I *knew* he was the Messiah but I thought that if I *said* it they would never believe. If I left it an unanswered question, they'd want to find out for themselves. And it worked. People left the city and were on their way to him. It worked. Many from my city believed in Jesus because of my testimony. And when they came to him, they asked him to stay with us; and he stayed here two days. And many more believed because of his word. Now people say, "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." I think they say it because it's hard for them to admit that *I* of all people was responsible for their belief in the Messiah. But they do treat me differently,

because *he* treated me differently. They treat me with respect because *he* treated me with respect. Because he knew everything about me and loved me anyway. And I think that's good news for all of us. He knows everything about us and loves us anyway.