

Text: [John 4:5-29 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: March 23, 2025

Title: Seeking – 3rd Sunday in Lent
“Will You Give Me a Drink?”

Theme: Serving in the name of Jesus requires us to be more than charitable; it requires us to be vulnerable.

1

Christian service was never meant to be at arm’s length

There have been so many reflections offered this month on the
five-year anniversary of the COVID-19 shutdown

I will forever remember it as one of the most brutal times to be a
pastor

Because week by week, writing a sermon and then preaching it to
a screen,

I felt utterly disconnected from the people I was called to serve

Whenever navigating the ins and outs of relationships in the
church feels tough

I think about what it was like without those relationships, and I’m
grateful

Because Christian ministry was never meant to be disconnected
Or disembodied

It does harm – not only to us

But to the people we serve

Last year, during the height of the war in Gaza, aid groups from
various nations – including the United States

Were absolutely desperate to get food into the hands of people

They STILL are as Israel has cut off all humanitarian aid¹

But last March, the situation was so dire
And conditions on the ground so dangerous
That several nations were dropping food aid out of cargo planes
Which is never anyone's first choice
Because when parachutes fail, people can get hurt
In one incident, five people were killed by the very aid meant to
save their lives²

2

When we aren't seeing people
We can make all kinds of assumptions about who they are
And about what they need
We can make judgments that are entirely unfounded

As we lean into stereotypes and preconceived ideas
We might find that we're actually doing more harm than good
Hurting people in the process
And most certainly missing out on what they might have to teach
us

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote this in his sermon
["On Visiting the Sick"](#):

"One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not CARE to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it – and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart." (emphasis mine)

I think about this quote frequently in a time where it seems so many are so callous toward the plight of those in need, whether they be:

The poor
Immigrants to this country
The transgender community
Those who are anxious about their jobs because of all the
upheaval right now

Part of my question would be: have we taken the time to know
people in any of these communities?

Or are we practicing “voluntary ignorance” so that we can
continue to remain blind to people’s need?

Remember: Christian service was never meant to be at arm’s
length

3

The story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well is,
for me, a story about growing in respect for someone we
might consider the “other”

It’s a story about this unnamed woman’s vulnerability
But also about Jesus’ vulnerability
And his willingness to cross lines

Even his presence in Samaria was a deliberate choice to cross
lines

Pious Jews traveling between Jerusalem and Galilee where
Jesus grew up, would often go AROUND Samaria – which
lay in between

They would travel the Jordan River valley
Taking a longer route, rather than the more direct way and mixing
with Samaritans

The relationship between Jews and Samaritans was an example of familiarity breeding contempt
Even in the conversation with Jesus, the Samaritan woman acknowledges that they have a common ancestor in Jacob
But immediately names their disagreement over where was proper to worship – Jerusalem or Mt. Gerazim
A disagreement that came down to an argument over a single letter of the Hebrew alphabet in a single verse of scripture³

Everything about this conversation is charged
There are racial and religious dynamics
There are male/female dynamics
Because it was completely inappropriate for a rabbi to be talking to a woman not his wife,
Much less a five-times married *Samaritan* woman not his wife
Because after all, everyone knew that the well was a place where men went to meet women –
including their common ancestor, Jacob
Over and over in scripture we read about men and women looking for love at the well

So when Jesus asks what seems like simple question:
“Will you give me a drink?”
It’s not actually all that simple – the conversation is loaded

I see this as a moment of vulnerability for Jesus
Where he crosses several lines to seek help with something he needs
He’s hot, he’s tired, and he’s thirsty
And he’s a religious leader putting himself in danger of judgment for associating with her

This encounter also reveals the vulnerability of the woman
Unmarried, with a past that feels like it would take a while to unpack

Five times widowed OR five times divorced OR some combination of the two

It seems likely at least one divorce, as the idea that she's living with someone not her husband might point to a legal impediment to marriage⁴

And the fact that she is at the well at noon, scholars will say, probably indicates that she doesn't want to meet other women, who would have come earlier in the day for water
Perhaps because she feels judged?
It's hard to say

4

There's a lot of vulnerability to go around in this story
A lot of risk-taking
Jesus' vulnerability elicits vulnerability in the Samaritan woman

His willingness to ask a favor of her opens up honest conversation about life – even its most painful aspects
And she even opens up on her views about faith – one of the things all of us hold most closely
They connect to the point where, by the end of their interaction, She believes in Jesus and becomes perhaps the very first evangelist to Samaria!⁵

Which brings me back to where I started: we can't do Christian ministry at arm's length
We can't be distant, dispassionate, or disembodied
It's not enough to be charitable, we also have to be vulnerable

But you might ask why?
Why isn't it enough to just support something financially?

I give to a food bank
A homeless shelter
An organization that works with refugees
Why isn't that enough?

It's not enough because that was never the model of Jesus'
ministry
The "living water" he tells her about isn't just about not quenching
thirst
It isn't just about putting food in people's bellies
It's about offering relationship

So Jesus ate with people
He sat with them
And spoke with them
He listened to their pain
He touched people and healed them
And he let himself be served and cared for by people

When he was thirsty, he wasn't afraid to ask for a drink – even
from a Samaritan woman
When he was hungry, he wasn't afraid to sit down for a meal –
even if it was with tax collectors

We too often operate under the assumption – whether conscious
or unconscious –
that we're BETTER than the people we're wanting to serve
That they have nothing to offer us
Nothing we need
Nothing to teach us
Nothing to show us about life or about service or about God

That's not who Jesus was

And we see all of it in his one question: "Will you give me a drink?"

It's about connection through vulnerability

The living water Jesus offers is about relationships

First with us

And then through us, to God

So this week, I have this challenge for you

Will you let yourself be vulnerable, just for a moment,
and stop presenting yourself in all the ways that suggest you're
better than others?

This week, try to remember Jesus' question:

"Can I have a drink of water?"

And ask for help rather than just reflexively saying,

"No, it's ok, I've got it"

Maybe you could reveal just a little bit more about what's going on
in your life when someone asks: "How are you doing today?"

And then, be willing to follow the conversation where it goes

Because this is what Christian service looks like in the world

Fully embodied

With vulnerability and willingness to admit your own struggles

That's the stuff of relationship

The living water of life in God and with God

We can't do ministry from arm's length

It's not enough to be charitable, we have to be vulnerable

It's not about just meeting needs, but making God known

Because what Jesus offers us, more than anything, is relationship

People won't see God unless they see us first. Amen.

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¹ <https://apnews.com/article/gaza-israel-hamas-palestinians-aid-explainer-ecc0e70d5ff1120a04bf36626dfd96f4>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68514467>

³ As I understand the argument, it was a disagreement over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 12:5: “But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there” (CEB). Jews interpreted this verse as pointing *ahead* to the revelation of Jerusalem as God’s chosen place to David. Samaritan Bibles instead pointed to Mt. Gerizim, near Shechem as “the place the Lord your God *has chosen*.” The difference in these two interpretations comes down to a single letter in Hebrew. See Bruce, F.F., *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), p.108.

⁴ Bruce, p. 107.

⁵ There’s some speculation that this interaction lays the groundwork for Philip’s ministry in a “Samaritan city” in Acts chapter 8.