

March 8, 2026  
John 4

*The Fountain Within*

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“Ask and it shall be given you, Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you.”

Good morning Beloved children of God.

We human beings are a complex system of interrelated dimensions. We each are heart, soul, mind and strength. We use these parts of ourselves to love God. We love God with our heart, in sharing love with friends and loved ones, caring for those who are hurting, feeling compelled to action due to injustice, pain, or sadness. We love God with all our soul by spending time in surrender, prayer, reflection, seeking healing and wholeness. We love God with all our mind by putting ourselves to study, reading, listening, engaging in teaching, asking questions, and probing the depths of our intellect. Then we also love God with all our strength, using not only our living body and its physical capacities or hugs and sharing physical affection but also by our resilience, by our capacity to hold challenging things, to be resilient when tested.

Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is not an easy feat. Often as humans we feel drawn to one dimension over another. When I first came to faith, I was very soul-oriented, seeking any practice I could to hope to get closer to God. Meanwhile I was lacking in heart, often becoming frustrated in my teenage angst at home, or failing to stick through difficult tasks in school when I lacked interest. I'd get B's when I was far more intelligent and could have applied myself to a higher task if I had built up some strength around stress management and balancing everything. But in time, and I believe this is the work of good spiritual formation offered through the various pastors and organizations that have shaped me, I've had the chance to grow in each of these areas. Are we ever all balanced out?? Unlikely... but seeing faith as a chance to connect heart, soul, mind, and strength is a helpful way to see how we are showing up in our relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is a dynamic connection, one which grows. It often is perceived as inward work. In our American culture there is a heavy emphasis on a “Personal relationship with God” which emphasizes often personal prayer, study, reading of scripture, solitude and silence. It includes worship, but often in my mind focuses on a worship experience that is less communal and more oriented towards isolation. We can arrive, watch independently, and return to our homes. More often than not now with the advent of online worship, (even when we are able bodied and have time on our hands) it's easier to watch from home. Now watching from home is better than not engaging at all, but it leaves the viewer with a sense of isolation, because in the end we are often alone, with a screen. I want to encourage our online worshipers to join us if you can, and if not to make sure you have a faithful person, or small group to gather with for support in your faith journey. If you live in a care facility to use the spiritual resources available or seek visitation.

Because the faith journey is not private. We as the Body of Christ are members together. We are not isolated. I heard a preacher once say the biggest lie ever told was in the folk song by Simon & Garfunkel

"I am a Rock, I am an island, and a rock feels no pain and an island never cries." It's simply not true. We were made for community, we were built for relationship by a loving God. That's why we gather as a church, it's why we are born into family.

A better interpretation of our need for relationship is in Carol King's response to James' Taylor's "Fire and Rain" Where he sings, 'I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend.' And she writes, "You just call out my name, and you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again. Winter, spring, summer, or fall, all you gotta do is call, and I'll be there. You got a friend."

Sure Jesus sought to isolate, to go away from the crowds. He found himself in the garden alone, and the disciples were sleeping. But often he is found trying to get away, and somehow the crowd still follows him. We might try to do faith on our own, and certainly there are times to get away, but we are never truly alone. The community is always around. The question is whether we engage or not. And often—the extent to whether someone is able to be in community depends on what is happening in the inward self. If we are experiencing imbalance in life it is often manifested by an isolation. According to a 2018 national survey by Cigna, loneliness levels have reached an all-time high, with nearly half of 20,000 U.S. adults reporting they sometimes or always feel alone. Forty percent of survey participants also reported they sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful and that they feel isolated.

In this morning's story, I suppose the woman at the well was isolated. To visit her, Jesus goes out of his way geographically, crosses cultural barriers of race and gender. The scriptures say in verse 4, "He had to go through Samaria." Samaria was not a common stop between Judea and Galilee. It would have been out of the way. He was on a mission to visit a woman who was seen as outside of the religious circles of the time. He was demonstrating what he had just taught Nicodemus, that "God so loved the world." What better way to demonstrate God's love for the world, than to be in the world, with a woman like her. She has a complex past history of relationships. Now, unnecessarily commentators have speculated this is a lewd sexual history, but the truth is there are several reasons why she may have several husbands due to cultural rules and laws, and the reality of mortality rates in those days. Recall she is not able to divorce of her own free will.

She is taken aback by Jesus' interaction. Social isolation and cues prevail even when the Son of Man visits her. She responds to him in questions, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" When our isolation is questioned, we often feel unworthy, inadequate, not-enough. We could seem confused, or directionless.

But confronted with this man Jesus, who crossed all these boundaries to meet her, and offered her a resource that would quench her thirst, the draw unto him wins over her

inadequacies and she consents by saying, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” I think this tells us that God is faithful in our questioning. It is normal to be unsure or surprised when we encounter the gift that is eternal life. It seems too good to be true at first, but then when realizing our human need we accept it.

Now, what I love about this story, is that after she receives the truth about the “inward spring gushing to eternal life” she is empowered to tell others. She is fully seen by Jesus, and she is hopeful, and she must share the good news. It is a natural outflowing by the work Jesus has done in her life.

Some of you know I was out of town this week. I was selected to be a part of the Emerging Clergy with Pastor Adam Hamilton, who is pastor at United Methodist Church of the Resurrection. It was an honor to be alongside colleagues 40 or so and under to hear from leading pastors, receive mentoring, and learn leadership principles. This is the fellowship which traveled to England I’ve referred to in the past. As a part of our visit to Dallas we visited some of the churches in the area and learned about how ministry was different in each context. One church in particular, Lover’s Lane United Methodist (which used to be on Lover’s Lane, hence the name) has the largest freestanding stained glass room in the United States. The panes of glass show the chaos of creation in a mid-century style with nuance and architectural interest as the glasses are triangulated in an accordion style. Now I had a friend who narrowly missed that part of the tour because his flight was delayed, and on the way back to the airport we had some time to fill. There were three of us, but knowing my one friend hadn’t seen the art, and that I knew he would like it, I just *had* to show it to him, and so I called the church and we returned to see it so he could experience it too. There’s a certain amount of satisfaction that when something is good, you want to share it. And when you see the joy or wonder of someone else experiencing that good, it brings incredible fulfillment. I watched as he enjoyed the art and even pointed out some things we had not noticed our first visit.

Spiritual growth, if we are truly open to the Spirit working within us, not only waters us but it waters those around us. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm it says my “Cup runneth over”. As God pours the Holy Spirit into us, we become fountains of living water, and fountains do not run dry, and they pour out water for others.

I imagine the church as a splash pad. In the summer heat, you take the kids to the splash pad, and there are many many different types of shapes of apparatus, and different timing, and streams of water which shoot every which way and which direction. Everyone is cooling off, having fun, playing experiencing the wonder and excitement. We can play together.

This story of the woman at the well turns from isolation to community, and that is what the Christian faith does, because we not only love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, but we love our neighbor as ourselves. Love God, Love Neighbor. These aims aren’t achievable by our own might, but they happen as we surrender to God. They well up within us, as living water. Amen.