

Sermon for Sunday, March 12, 2023
Third Sunday in Lent
“Mutuality of Need”
Reverend Amy Zalk Larson
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.

I invite you to use your imagination for a bit - kids, adults, all of us. Imagine it's a really hot day and you're incredibly thirsty. You're all out of water. If you don't get some soon things are going to get tricky - dehydration, heat stroke even. You've got to ask another person for a drink but that's going to be tricky, given who that person is.

Maybe you're at another school early, warming up before a big meet or game, and you discover you forgot to fill your water bottle. You can't find a drinking fountain anywhere. The only person around to ask is your biggest competition, a person standing between you and getting to state. You have to ask for help.

Or maybe it's an unseasonably hot fall day during election season. You and a friend are out knocking on doors for your candidate when you realize you've got to get indoors and have a drink quickly, or you'll faint. The closest house is the one with the political signs that make your skin crawl.

Imagining scenarios like that can give us a taste of what Jesus might be feeling as he asks the Samaritan woman for a drink. He's tired, thirsty, and in need. It's a hot, dry climate. There's a well but he doesn't have a jar. The only person who can get him water is someone a Jewish man isn't supposed to *talk to*, much less ask for help, a Samaritan woman.

Just by speaking to her, Jesus demonstrates his willingness to be vulnerable. He risks his reputation, the credibility of his ministry, her anger. Then Jesus goes a step further and asks for what he needs, showing that even he can't make it alone. That's another huge risk - for the Son of God to be so openly human. I mean, who wants a vulnerable Savior? A Savior who has needs? Who asks for help?

Yet Jesus' vulnerability transforms this woman's life. It seems when he asks something of her, she begins to trust him. She has at least five reasons why he shouldn't be vulnerable to anyone, yet she engages in honest conversation with him. She asks questions, seeks to understand, and boldly asks Jesus for living water. She also shares her needs with him. Five different men have divorced her, leaving her incredibly vulnerable in a patriarchal society. She tells Jesus the truth, risking judgment and scorn. Both Jesus and the woman model a beautiful vulnerability, or what Dr. Karoline Lewis describes as a ***mutuality of need***. Jesus needs water to drink, and the woman needs living water. Jesus needs her to be a witness, and she needs Jesus to invite her into a new identity.

What do you most need?

What might God do as you are vulnerable and honest about your needs, your humanity?

If you ask that competitor for help, what might happen?

If you show your humanity to someone on the *other side* and look for their humanity, what might happen?

Together, could we experience this mutuality of need and care?

Dr. Lewis' insight about the mutuality of need inspired the artist for today's painting, Rev. Lauren Wright Pitman. After reading Lewis, Pitman noticed that in most art inspired by this story, Jesus and the Samaritan woman are not on the same level. So, Pitman created this image with their body positioning mirrored and their eyes on the same plane. Let's take a closer look at the image on your bulletins and up here, and listen to some of Pitman's artist statement to help open us to this story.

She writes, "Where their arms overlap becomes a vibrant blue, creating a water drop with a dove in it, representing the living water that springs forth from their mutual need and relationship.

"Each of their clothing is patterned with the other's need.

- In Jesus' clothing are simplified 'springs of water gushing up to eternal life.'
- In the Samaritan woman's clothes, her water jar is positioned upright and poured out, representing her wrestling with whether she will interact with this man—and further, whether he is the awaited Messiah.

"The image is subtly divided in half by slight shifts in color value. There is a chasm between them socially, culturally, religiously. [The conflict between Jews and Samaritans over their places of worship shows up here too. On the left is the temple in Jerusalem, and on the right is Mount Gerizim.]

"In the center is the Samaritan woman's vessel. We aren't told whether she fills the jar or gives Jesus water, however we are told that she leaves the jar behind. Her need is not the water in the well; her need is for grounding in a new identity, and to be seen for who she really is. She needs to be defined not by the worst parts of her life, the number of her husbands, or others' assumptions, but to be seen through the lens of mutual need—to be seen as one of the first witnesses of the Messiah, and now a vessel of living water herself."¹

What do you most need?

What defines you?

Is Jesus needing your life to be defined by something deeper, something truer?

What springs of water are waiting to gush up in you?

Jesus, our vulnerable Savior, meets us at the font and at the table.

Jesus engages us in conversation today through scripture and song.

Jesus asks for our help, our vulnerability, our witness, our mutuality.

Jesus gives us living water to spring up to eternal life.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.

¹ Rev. Lauren Wright Pitman, Artists statement for the piece "Living Water Inspired by John 4:5-42"
Digital painting purchased from A Sanctified Art, asanctifiedart.org

