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We pray each Sunday: Give us this day our daily...bread. Is that really enough? Are we truly content with only bread? How about some brownies as well?

Are we satisfied if we receive just enough for today? How about enough for tomorrow, and maybe some leftovers for next week?

When I pray The Lord's Prayer, I sometimes wonder what kind of bread Jesus in mind. Although literal bread and food are necessities of life, you may recall in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel when Jesus called himself the bread of life; he looked beyond the sandwich bread for our stomachs to something even more filling. He suggested that with him, one would no longer hunger or thirst, which echoes the story in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel read this morning. It's about the time Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman at a well and struck up a conversation, referring to himself as living water.

The conversation was unusual for a couple reasons: First, an unmarried man and woman would

not speak privately with one another in that culture, which the narrator highlighted by noting that the disciples had gone to town to buy food and questioned his behavior when they returned.

Secondly, the narrator reminds us of the gulf between Jews and Samaritans by noting that they would not share things in common with one another, such as a cup or a drink of water. The rivalry between these groups of people went back centuries to a time when the Assyrian army had captured the northern kingdom of Israel, when Samaria was the capital city. Resentment grew since the southern nation of Judah did not intervene to help.

Many years later when Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, many of the people were carried off into exile, and when they returned generations later, much distrust and bitterness had grown between the people who had remained living in Samaria and those who now returned. Religious practices had evolved, and although both groups of people claimed the same historical and religious

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roots, both groups of people had changed much over the years, which intensified the friction between them.



I recently found a piece of artwork that highlights the tension in the scene. Notice how the modern Polish artist, Jacek Malczewski (YAHT-sek mal-CHEV-ski) portrays Jesus and the woman. As our Gazing at Art prayer group looked at this painting this week, we noticed Jesus' surprising aloofness as he looked away from the woman. The lighting in the picture focuses on the woman, while Jesus appears in the shadows. Some felt uncomfortable with the apparent avoidance Jesus portrayed, but we also wondered if the scene reflected the uncertainty of the time, the hesitation of a man and woman, Jew and Samaritan, to speak with one another.

When Jesus offered the woman living water, she objected and wondered how he could get any water from the well without a bucket. Jesus suggested that he had water from a spring that would gush up

to eternal life. She was so enthralled that she asked him for a drink of this amazing water.

The conversation between them continued, focusing on the woman's personal life and worship practices, but the conversation was cut short when the disciples arrived and scolded Jesus for speaking with a Samaritan woman. She ran home, telling everyone about Jesus, wondering if he could be the Messiah, the one they had waited for to change the world into a better place.

Jesus didn't see a gulf between himself and the woman. Instead, he saw an opportunity to extend his vision of hope to a broader community, to include those often excluded. A sculpture portrays this scene with this welcoming perspective. English sculptor Stephen Broadbent created "The Water of Life" in 1994 in a courtyard in an ancient cathedral in Chester, England.



While looking at this sculpture, what do you notice about how the story of the meeting of Jesus and the woman at the well are portrayed? ...

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- They both spring up from the same water.
- Rather than avoiding one another, they look deeply into one another's eyes.
- They share a common cup of water.

This living water freed her from the constraints of bitterness, of backgrounds that divided their people. The living water freed her from gender taboos. The living water prompted her to find her voice and become the first woman in John's Gospel to tell others about the good news of Jesus. This rushing water had freed her beyond the narrow limits that life and society had imposed upon her. Her experience is similar to a story

Mark Twain [told] in one of his books of a slave who went to sleep one night on a narrow neck of land in Missouri, that jutted out into the Mississippi River. That night there was a great storm, and the river cut a new channel, right through the neck of land. When the slave awoke the next morning, he found himself not in Missouri, but in Illinois — a free man! The rushing water had freed him. Such is the case

with the woman at the well: she is freed by the living water.<sup>1</sup>

How might this living water free us? Some have noted that the past few months they have experienced an energy flowing through us, somewhat like living water. For those from CCC, they have learned that the church is more about the people gathered together than the building. Many have learned to let go of the past and embrace what they experience here in this place.

Those from FCC have offered the waters of hospitality, welcoming new friends into this space and celebrating that we are one church, a place nourished by the living water that flows through us and is sustained by the bread of life.

How might this living water bring refreshment in your life? If you find yourself thirsty for this life-quenching water, take a drink. And while you're at it, give thanks for daily bread. Enough for today. Enough for always.

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<sup>1</sup> HomileticsOnline.com, March 12, 2023.