

March 8, 2026 – Psalm 84:1-5, Exodus 17:1-7, & John 4:5-26

Most people have places where they simply love to be. It might be sitting across the table from a close friend or a beloved family member, enjoying the comfort of their company. It might be returning to a favorite vacation spot where life slows down and the worries of daily work fade away. Sometimes it's something as simple as coming home after a long trip and finally sleeping in your own bed. These are the places where we feel at peace, where we feel safe and content. You might call them our “happy places.” The places we most want to be.

For the psalmist in our Introit this morning, that happy place was the dwelling place of the Lord. *“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD.”* The place he longed for above all others was where God had promised to dwell with His people: the tabernacle, and later the temple in Jerusalem.

There in the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant, the sign of God’s gracious presence among His people. To be near the house of the Lord was to be near the Lord Himself. That's why the psalmist envies even the birds that make their nests near the altar. *“Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise.”*

And yet, that longing to be near God isn't unique to the psalmist. It's the longing of every human heart, even if people don't always recognize it. From the beginning of creation, in the Garden of Eden, human beings were created to live in God's presence. To meet with Him and walk with Him in the cool of the day, just as Adam and Eve once did.

But sin has driven us away from that life. Because of sin, humanity wanders far from the place where it truly belongs. Instead of living in the presence of God, people search for meaning and satisfaction in countless other things. Yet no matter where they look, that same thirst for God's presence remains.

That thirst is what we see in our Gospel reading from John chapter 4. Jesus travels through Samaria and stops near the town of Sychar. It's the sixth hour, in other words, about noon. And, weary from His journey, He sits at a watering hole outside the town known as Jacob’s Well.

Right about then, a Samaritan woman comes to draw water. And their conversation is unusual from the very beginning. Because Jesus asks her for a drink of water. Now, that's not very odd for us. But in that day it was unheard. A Jewish man, a respected rabbi, drinking water touched by an unclean Samaritan woman? It's positively scandalous.

But almost immediately it becomes clear that Jesus' request has very little to do with His physical thirst. This encounter isn't accidental. Jesus has come here for a purpose. He has come seeking her. *“If you knew the gift of God,”* He says, *“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.”*

The woman misunderstands Him, of course. She thinks He's talking about the well in front of them. She points out that the well is deep and Jesus has nothing to draw water with. He's in no position to offer anyone water. And even if he did have a way to get water, how could He possibly provide better water than the patriarch Jacob, who dug that very well?

But Jesus continues. He explains that the water from that well cannot truly satisfy. *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

This conversation has moved far beyond a simple watering hole in the desert. Jesus is describing our sinful condition. Every person in this world is thirsty. And the things of this world can't satisfy that thirst. People drink from many wells: wealth, relationships, achievements, power, and pleasures. But the thirst always returns.

The Samaritan woman herself is an example of that searching. As the conversation unfolds, Jesus reveals that He knows her life. He knows she has had five husbands, and the man she now lives with is not her husband.

We don't know the full story of how she ended up with this history, but the pattern is clear enough. She's been looking for something. Love, security, belonging... something this sinful world values. But every attempt has left her thirsty again. The wells that she has drawn from have never given her the life she hoped for.

That story isn't unique to her. It's the story of humanity. Sin leaves us empty and unsatisfied. And in that emptiness people often begin to doubt God Himself.

We see that same pattern in the Old Testament reading from Exodus. Israel is traveling through the wilderness, and there is no water to drink. Their thirst quickly turns into complaint and accusation. They quarrel with Moses and question why he brought them out of Egypt. And soon their frustration becomes doubt: *"Is the LORD among us or not?"*

That's the important question, isn't it? Beneath their physical thirst lies a deeper spiritual problem. They doubt the presence and faithfulness of God. Yet the Lord doesn't abandon them. Instead He commands Moses to strike the rock at Horeb. And when Moses obeys, water flows out of the rock. Water enough for all the people. They were convinced they would die of thirst in the desert, but God provided life.

That miracle points forward to something greater. When Jesus promises living water to the Samaritan woman, He reveals that, in the desert of this world, He Himself is our source of life. The water He gives doesn't simply quench physical thirst for a moment. It becomes a spring that wells up to eternal life.

As His conversation with the woman continues, she begins to realize that she is speaking with someone extraordinary. She recognizes that Jesus must be a prophet, and the discussion turns to a subject that had long divided Jews and Samaritans: worship.

The Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim, while the Jews insisted that the true place of worship was the temple in Jerusalem. For centuries this dispute had separated the two peoples. So the woman asks the obvious question: where should people truly worship God?

But Jesus doesn't pick one mountain or the other. Yes, the Jews were at one time right for worshipping at Jerusalem, and salvation was found there. But that time is coming to an end anyway.

*"The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." The time is arriving when worship will no longer be defined by a particular location. Instead, Jesus says, "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."*

Something new has come into the world. The presence of God is no longer confined to a temple building or a sacred mountain. The dwelling place of God has now appeared in the person of Jesus Himself. In Him the presence of God has come near to sinners. In Him the thirst of the human heart is quenched.

And deep down, I think she knows that that is the person she needs. She doesn't need another false god offering a temporary fix to her problems. She needs the Messiah who is coming into the world. She needs the one who can reveal all the wisdom of God's Law and Gospel to her. But she doesn't need to search any longer: *"I who speak to you am he."*

The Messiah is standing before her. The one who gives living water is the one speaking to her at that very moment. And that water flows from His saving work.

The apostle Paul describes that gift in our Epistle from Romans: *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Jesus gives His life for people just like this woman. Those wandering far from Him. Those who have spent their lives seeking the sinful things of this world in order to quench their thirst. Those who have rejected the God who gives us every good gift.

Jesus bears their sin and their judgment so that they may receive forgiveness and eternal life. From His death and resurrection flows the living water that gives life to the world. Water so that they'll never be thirsty again.

The writer of Psalm 84 yearned for the dwelling place of God. In Jesus, that dwelling place has come among us. Through Him sinners are brought into the presence of the Father. Through Him the thirsty find springs of living water.

The Father is still seeking worshipers. Not people who believe they can satisfy their own thirst, but people who come empty and receive the gift Christ gives. Through His Word and Spirit He creates faith in the heart. And that faith drinks deeply from the living water of the Gospel.

Blessed are those who dwell in the house of the Lord. Blessed are those whose strength is in Him. Blessed are those with faith in Jesus Christ. For in Christ the living water flows, and whoever drinks of that water will never be thirsty again. Amen.