

# “Easter Imagination”

*Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:5-42*

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**Prayer for Understanding** God of conversation, we come to you today thirsty—thirsty for hope, thirsty for good news, thirsty for a glimpse of you. So today we pray, move in these words like a current. Give us the courage to wade into your story with open eyes and open hearts. Give us the courage to drink this moment in. We are listening. We are grateful. Amen.

Our scriptures the rest of Lent talk about God encountering people who are seeking. In these stories, each person is seeking a new beginning, a different life, an encounter of God, an experience of grace. What unfolds is an exchange filled with questions and exploration. Often, an unveiling occurs—assumptions are disrupted, a new perspective is revealed, mystery grows. Join the seekers. Ask the questions. The questions will challenge you, change you, and restore you. Some questions will provide answers of hope. Some questions will guide you to a new perspective, a new beginning, a wider grace. Perhaps you are seeking clarity, connection, wonder, equality, rhythm, your calling, the sacred, how to Know Christ and Show Christ. The rest of Lent you are invited to engage in the spiritual practice of seeking. You are invited to stay curious, open, and nimble. You are invited to soften your assumptions and expand your perspectives. You are invited to explore, to be drawn more deeply into the fullness of life, into the love of God. You are invited to expand your imagination.

Pastor Lauren Wright Pittman writes: “Seeking is about being raw and honest in our questioning, our doubts, our fears, our confusion, our discoveries—and in that process, unveiling a more authentic, relationship with God. It is in our seeking that we journey alongside Jesus and ultimately, find the sunrise”.

The Israelites were seeking freedom and abundant life in the Promised Land. They were seeking change from being slaves to a community who receives God’s blessings and blesses everyone. They were seeking the fulfillment of their imagination, a joyful, loving, whole life in the Promised Land. Their journey was arduous. Changing was much, much harder than they anticipated. Their struggle was within, their heart wanted to change, their memory wanted the familiar, conflicting thoughts wrestled in their minds. As is often the case, rather than focusing on the work of change they needed to do they instead blamed someone else and confined their imagination.

**Exodus 17:1-7 NLT “At the Lord’s command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. So once more the people complained against Moses. “Give us water to drink!” they demanded. “Quiet!” Moses replied. “Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord?” But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?” Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!” The Lord said to Moses, “Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink.” So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on. Moses named the place Massah (which means “test”) and Meribah (which means “arguing”) because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord here with us or not?””**

“Give us a drink,” the Israelites asked. God hears them, readily responds, and calls Moses to bring forth water from a rock. Do the people know what they truly thirst for?

In the seasons of our lives, many have felt frustrated and lost in the wilderness. During these times, our fear gets the better of us. We see only scarcity. We become fixated on our needs, our thirst. Survival mode reigns. Sometimes our focus on survival is so loud we miss the cry underneath: “God, have you abandoned me?” What would it have looked like if the Israelites had instead cried out for God’s assurance? “Show us you are still with us, God,” they could have prayed with open hearts. “We feel alone and unmoored. Help us change.” Where could the water have come from, if the question had come from a softer place than the rock of our human defenses? What are the softer questions underneath our human defenses? In the parched places of our souls, what are we thirsting for? God has promised to

always be with us. God's steadfast everlasting love endures forever. Most of us know this, and most of us believe this, however in the midst of pandemic, war, looming recession, a changing church, and a myriad of personal issues, often we also complain, blame, have little imagination and cry out to God. What reminds you that God is always with you? What do you do that assures you that you are loved by God? Where is living water for you? Do these things. How can you quiet your negative thoughts and be grateful, loving, and joyful? How do you assure yourself that every wilderness is temporary and the Promised Lands are forever. How can you sort through all the voices in your life, all the noise, all the distractions, to hear God? How can you be still, know God, know yourself, discover what you truly need and ask God for your needs? Do the answers to these questions. Ask family and friends to remind you to do these things. Leslie often tells me, "You need to go for a bike ride or a walk in the woods." My Spiritual Director tells me, "You need to go on a silent retreat in nature."

What do you do to expand your imagination of the coming glorious kingdom of God? A majestic world of extravagant love, ceaseless joy, enduring peace, growing abundance, complete wholeness, expanding wonders, and vibrant relationships with all people. Jesus and the prophets explained the coming glory with poetry, metaphors, and parables. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann laments how our imagination is often stifled by our current world, our current immediate needs often result in a pathetic rather than prophetic imagination. "Prophetic imagination is the capacity to host a glorious world other than the one that is in front of us. Pathetic imagination is incapable of hosting an alternative world and remains quite satisfied to have its sphere of possibility circumscribed to the small world in front of us. Thus in the confines of pathetic imagination, the claims of prophetic imagination are outrageous." How are you expanding your prophetic imagination, your Easter imagination, of the coming glorious cosmos?

Jesus modeled, taught, and healed to expand our imaginations, to fill us with hope for the fulfillment of Easter resurrection. Jesus crosses cultural, religious, and societal boundaries by leading his disciples through Samaria. In the heat of midday, he seeks out connection with a Samaritan woman drawing water from the well. Jesus' question to her is an invitation to a new way of life: "Will you give me a drink?" For the woman, to respond is risky and life changing. This question creates a dialogue between them in which Jesus sees the woman fully; she leaves the well transformed.

**John 4:5-42 NLT** "Eventually Jesus came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." Jesus was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." "But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." "Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water." "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her. "I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!" "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship God on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about God, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth. God is looking for those who will worship God that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!" Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find Jesus talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could Jesus possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see Jesus. Meanwhile, the disciples

were urging Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.” But Jesus replied, “I have a kind of food you know nothing about.” “Did someone bring Jesus food while we were gone?” the disciples asked each other. Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing God’s work. You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true. I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.” Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “Jesus told me everything I ever did!” When they came out to see Jesus, they begged him to stay in their village. So Jesus stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard Jesus ourselves. Now we know that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world.”

This passage gives rise to numerous seeking questions. What is living water for you? How are you thirsty? How are you asking God for a drink? How do you leave the past in the past to live in the present? How are you living water for others? How are you crossing boundaries, building relationships with people who live different lifestyles, believe different things, have a different culture, and have a different religion or no religion? Jesus and the Samaritan woman’s relationship was one of equality and mutual need. Jesus and the Samaritan woman remind us that we need each other. We need to be in relationship with people who are radically different from us to be whole. How are you seeking relationships of equality with everyone? How does this account expand your Easter imagination?

“Anything and Everything”

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

I’d give you a drink, a warm cup of tea with lemon and mint,  
a confetti cannon, roses from the garden, my favorite sweatshirt, a bed to lay in,  
homemade bread, a hand to hold.

I’d give you my full attention.

I’d give you my phone, and say, put your number in.

I’d give you the melody line, a standing ovation, a sense of security.

I’d give you anything and everything if it made you believe that you were enough.

Pastor Lauren Wright Pittman writes: “The Samaritan woman needs to not be defined by the worst parts of her life, the number of her husbands, or others’ assumptions, rather to be seen through the lens of mutual need—to be seen as one of the first witnesses of the Messiah, and a vessel of living water herself.” How does Jesus and the Samaritan communicate interdependence and mutuality?

Everything Jesus risks by speaking with the Samaritan woman—crossing cultural, religious, and social lines—demonstrates Jesus’ willingness to be vulnerable. When Jesus asks for what he needs, he shows that even Jesus cannot make it alone. What a risk for the Son of God to be so openly human. And yet, it is this question—and Jesus’ willingness—that leads to this woman’s transformation. Despite a long list of good reasons why she should not be vulnerable to anyone, she boldly asks Jesus for living water. And she did so, fully trusting Jesus would give it. We often see this Gospel story as a bridge-building one. It is a reminder to be brave enough to cross boundaries and offer a drink to those society may separate from us. It reminds us that God designed this whole world to run on benevolent connection and that requires us to be more than charitable, to be vulnerable. And that takes courage to be vulnerable with strangers, to even be vulnerable with our enemies. How are you receiving living water? How are you offering living water?

Jesus and the Samaritan woman reveal that our Easter imagination needs to include being in vulnerable, equal, loving relationship with people all of genders, of all cultures, of all religions. Our Easter imagination needs to include being in loving relationship with our enemies. Our Easter imagination needs to include being in loving relationship with everyone. How are you like the Samaritan woman fully trusting that God will give you the kingdom of God? How are you expanding your Easter imagination? How are you cultivating your hope, your confident expectancy, that your Easter imagination will be fulfilled, and you, and all of us, will enjoy much, much more than all our grandest imaginations combined. Amen