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John 4:1-42  
9th Message  
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During a dinner party in a scene in the movie *The Joy Luck Club*<sup>1</sup>, based on Amy Tan's novel about a community of Chinese-Americans, Waverly publicly shames her friend June for lacking style. June's mother Suyuan, in her broken English, seems to pile on: "True. Cannot teach style. June not like Waverly. Must be born this way."

After dinner, a humiliated June tells her mother, "I'm just sorry you got stuck with such a loser, that I've always been so disappointing." June complains that she hasn't lived up to her mother's expectations, to which Suyuan responds that she never expected anything from June: "Never expect. Only hope. Only hoping best for you. It's not wrong to hope."

June, in tears: "No? Well it hurts, because every time you hoped for something I couldn't deliver, it hurt. It hurt me, Mommy. And no matter what you hope for, I'll never be more than who I am. And you never see that—what I really am."

Suyuan, turning to look full in her daughter's face: "I see you. I see you."

Harking back to dinner, Suyuan tells June: "That bad crab, only you tried to take it. Everybody else want best quality. You, your thinking different. Waverly took best-quality crab. You took worst, because you have best-quality heart."

Suyuan, cradling her daughter's face: "You have style no one can teach. Must be born this way . . . I see you."

How much we want to be known! How little we feel known! You might say that we thirst to be known, to be accepted, to be valued. "You want a cool breeze to dance with your flame / A long-lost lover who knows your true name"<sup>2</sup> In John 4, a woman visits a well only to discover, upon meeting Jesus, that she thirsts for something other than the water for which she came. Like us, she thirsts to be known.

The story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well is not a new story; it's an old story with a new twist. The Hebrew Scriptures feature three fully developed woman-at-the-well stories (Genesis 24, Genesis 29:1-14, Exodus 2:15-22). The stories feature the following motifs: 1) A man or a surrogate travels to a foreign land. 2) He

meets a woman at a well. 3) The woman runs home to announce the arrival of the foreigner. 4) Marriage between the foreigner and the woman is arranged.

No one in these stories, however, lives happily ever after, which leaves readers of the Scriptures to wait and hope for a happy ending. Will this story give us one?

John 4:1-18:

**<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John <sup>2</sup>(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), <sup>3</sup>he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. <sup>4</sup>And he had to pass through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.**

**<sup>7</sup>A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup>(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, 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." <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

**<sup>15</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." <sup>17</sup>The**

**woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”**

## Jesus asks for a drink

When Jesus asks the woman for a drink, he breaks with two customs. First, he approaches a Samaritan, and Jews traditionally shunned Samaritans, who were considered half-breeds and usurpers, harking all the way back to the north-south split in the kingdom of Israel after the reign of Solomon. As John observes, Jews “have no dealings with” Samaritans—an expression that, when translated literally, conveys Jewish refusal to use Samaritan dishes and vessels. Jesus asks for the Samaritan to serve him a drink with her bucket (he has “nothing to draw water with”).

Second, Jesus asks a woman for a drink, and Jewish men, especially Jewish rabbis, took pains to avoid being alone with women who were not their wives in order to guard against immorality and gossip but also because women, like Samaritans, were considered second-class. From the perspective of Jewish men, the Samaritan woman has two strikes against her: she’s a Samaritan and she’s a woman. Jesus, by asking the Samaritan woman for a drink, demonstrates that he is neither a racist nor a sexist.

Consider this parallel from the not-too-distant past in the American South. There are two drinking fountains, one labeled “White” and the other labeled “Colored,” and a white man approaches a black woman at the Colored fountain and asks her to give him a drink.

Jesus, weary from his journey, asks the woman for a drink because he’s thirsty but also because he’s doing the work that the Father sent him to do (verse 34). In this case, despite Jesus’ request of the Samaritan woman, the work that the Father sent him to do is not asking her for a drink but serving her a drink. In so many words, Jesus invites the woman to ask him for a drink of “living water,” which could simply mean spring water as opposed to standing water. For Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, to ask to be served by a Samaritan woman is shocking enough; for Jesus to offer to serve a Samaritan woman is doubly shocking.

Jesus is offering her something other than spring water, of course, but the woman cannot understand his meaning—at least for now. The woman, who knows the territory, wonders where this visitor proposes to get fresh spring water. The well she comes to, though it’s a bit of a hike, has done the job—and it has biblical history going for it, having been identified hundreds of years ago with Jacob, a patriarch of both Samaritans and Jews. The woman

says to Jesus can you top that?

Jesus draws out the meaning of his metaphor, even if he continues to speak figuratively. One drink of the water he’s offering will quench your thirst forever, because if you drink it, you will have a spring inside you, a constant source of living water that transcends the present age. Jesus is offering “eternal life”—literally, “life of age,” life of the new and final age, which is breaking into the present age. One drink of the living water that Jesus serves generates a spring for an eternity of drinks.

Much of what Jesus says is still lost on the woman, but she’s hoping—if she’s hoping at all, for what in the blazes is this guy talking about, anyway?—that maybe she won’t have to hoof it to Jacob’s well anymore. If Jesus is offering a dependable and nearby source of living (e.g., spring) water, she’ll take some: “Sir, give me this water.”

## Jesus serves a drink

Jesus says, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” Huh? Jesus was advertising water that would not require her to “come here” anymore, and when she takes him up on his offer, he tells her to go, call her husband, and “come here.” Part of the point of what Jesus was apparently offering was that she wouldn’t have to come here anymore. And why does she need to bring her husband? The woman says, in so many words, time to put an end to this tomfoolery: “I have no husband.”

Jesus isn’t finished though. On the one hand, she asked for living water, thinking that she was asking for fresh spring water. On the other hand, Jesus gives her not fresh spring water but living water, the kind that wells up to eternal life. How so? Why has she had five husbands, and why is she living with a man who isn’t her husband? The reasons aren’t important. Whatever the reasons, marriage, which is designed to illustrate God’s love for his people, hasn’t worked for her. Like all men and women, she’s spiritually thirsty, but in her case, the termination of five marriages and her current illicit relationship show her, or should show her, the depth of her thirst. She has no husband? She’s had five husbands? The man she now has isn’t her husband? Well, she had literally asked Jesus, “Where do you have that living water?” Every man she’s had hasn’t satisfied her spiritual thirst, but this man claims to have living water that wells up to eternal life.

She asks for living water, knowing not what she’s asking for, and Jesus gives it to her. How so? By telling her, in so many words, “I know you.” He knows all about her, all about her disappointments, her failings, and her shame, and he doesn’t run screaming from the well. On the contrary, knowing all about her, he has offered to serve

her, a Samaritan woman of dubious reputation. If other men have left her because they found her wanting, this man stays in order to serve her living water even though she tried to put him off. She's drinking living water.

When the woman returned to town to tell the townspeople about Jesus, what did she say? "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." John also reports that she told them, "He told me all that I ever did." Jesus told the woman much more than what she had done, including stunning words about the changing nature of worship, but what mattered most to her, what she deemed most worthy of reporting, was his knowledge of her. She expected the Messiah, when he came, to "tell us all things" concerning worship (John 4:25), but she didn't expect the Messiah to literally tell her "all things that I ever did." She didn't expect the Messiah to speak to her so knowingly, so personally, so intimately. Her testimony, scant though it was, generated a powerful response. As John reports, many of the townspeople believed in Jesus on the basis of her simple testimony concerning Jesus' knowledge of her.

## Thirsty to be known

Not many of us have been married five times, though the United States is now witnessing a "coming and going of partners" unprecedented in world history, according to sociologist Andrew J. Cherlin.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, more people are getting married later and fewer people are getting married at all. In 1970, married couples comprised 71 percent of U.S. households; by 2012, they comprised only 49 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. On the other hand, the number of people living alone has increased from 17 percent of households in 1970 to 27 percent in 2012. "The rise of living alone is the greatest social change of the last fifty years," said Eric Klinenberg, author of *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*.<sup>4</sup>

In a 2009 cover story for *Time* magazine, reporter Caitlin Flanagan observed:

*There is no other single force causing as much measurable hardship and human misery in this country as the collapse of marriage. It hurts children, it reduces mothers' financial security, and it has landed with particular devastation on those who can bear it least: the nation's underclass.*<sup>5</sup>

Marriage wasn't working for the woman at Sychar; maybe marriage isn't working so well in this time and place, either. Even those who are happily married still want something more than what the best human relationship can give them.

Happily married, unhappily married, never-married, five-time-married, we're thirsty—thirsty to be known. But there's a catch, isn't there? We want to be known, but we're also afraid to be known. We're afraid to be known and found wanting, for as Bob Dylan sings,

*And if my thought-dreams could be seen  
They'd probably put my head in a guillotine.*<sup>6</sup>

Brent Curtis and John Eldredge tell the story of a pastor whose wife convinced him to go to marriage counseling with her. The night before their appointment, he had a dream in which the counselor uncovered his true self, then leapt from her chair and ran out of the office and down the street, screaming, "My God—he's a pastor!"<sup>7</sup>

We're not simply thirsty to be known; we're thirsty to be known and accepted, even valued.

Just as Jesus knew the woman from Sychar, he knows you. He knows all the things that you've ever done, and he even knows your thought-dreams. What does he do? Does he run screaming from the well, from the office, or from the room? No, he serves you living water. He turns to look you full in the face and tells you, "I see you. I see you . . . I see you."

First, Jesus knows us. Next, the Father seeks us.

## Where's the living water?

John 4:19-26:

**<sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."**

How does Jesus know so much about this woman? John would have us believe that the Father revealed this



information to him, for the woman surmises that Jesus is a prophet, one who receives revelation from God. So, maybe he knows what he's talking about, she thinks. And, he's identified her spiritual thirst. And, he knows all about her and still wants to serve her. Therefore, she asks Jesus a question about worship, because spiritual thirst is quenched—or is supposed to be quenched—in worship. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord used water and thirst imagery in connection with worship: “for my people have committed two evils: / they have forsaken me, / the fountain of living waters, / and hewed out cisterns for themselves, / broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). Likewise, the psalmists thirsted for God (Psalms 42:2, 63:1, 143:6). The woman's question, then, proceeds naturally from her spiritual thirst.

Both the Samaritans and the Jews, based on Deuteronomy 12:5, believed that there should be a central place of worship. The Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Pentateuch doesn't identify the permanent place. Not until the time of David, as recorded in 2 Samuel, did the Lord identify Jerusalem as the place. So the Samaritans worshiped on “this mountain,” Mount Gerizim, and the Jews worshiped on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem.

Note that the woman says that the Jews claim that Jerusalem is the authorized place of worship, in the present, but that the ancestors of the Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim. Her ancestors worshiped on Mount Gerizim, in the past, but she says nothing about her worship on Mount Gerizim in the present. Although she's a Samaritan, she distances herself from the worship on Mount Gerizim. Marriage isn't working for her. Mount Gerizim isn't working for her, either. Whatever worship she's participated in on Mount Gerizim hasn't helped her either with her relational life or the shame that has come from it. It's left her spiritually parched. So, maybe what's going on in Jerusalem is where it's at. What does Jesus, a Jew who also sounds like a prophet, have to say? Is Jerusalem “the place” to worship? Is that where the living water is?

## Prodigal daughter

Jesus says that the woman's question will be irrelevant in the future and, in some way, is irrelevant even now. Although it was never supposed that the temple in Jerusalem contained God, there was a time when place was important, in order to guard against idolatry, but that time is coming to an end. The Samaritans, disregarding revelation from God after the Pentateuch, worship in ignorance. Jews who worship in Jerusalem do so based on more complete revelation from God. The most complete revelation concerning salvation, therefore, is “from the Jews.”

The place of worship is becoming irrelevant because the Messiah transcends the temple in Jerusalem first by embodying the presence of God and second, after his death and resurrection, by sending the Holy Spirit, who will dwell in and among the people of God, making them the temple (John 2:19-22; 14:1-3, 17). There will be no need to travel to the temple in Jerusalem after the Spirit of God comes. The Messiah—the Messiah who is Jewish, for salvation is from the Jews—is Jesus of Nazareth, of course, the very man with whom the Samaritan woman is conversing. Thus, with the advent of the Messiah, the Father is seeking “true worshipers” regardless of whether they are Jews or Samaritans. Note that the woman has spoken about worship, but Jesus identifies the object of worship in a very personal way, not even as God per se but as “the Father.”

It's as if God, now known as the Father, has left his home in Jerusalem to seek his lost children wherever they are. The story of the woman at the well is John's version of Luke's parable of the prodigal son—only John's story features a prodigal daughter. The Father seeks a prodigal daughter, the woman of Sychar; he seeks a prodigal people, the Samaritans; he seeks prodigal humanity, all of us. Where does he seek? He seeks “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7).

## The Father seeks true worshipers

True worshipers will worship the Father—in fact, they “must” worship the Father—“in spirit and truth.” What does that mean?

The words “spirit” and “truth” are in contrast to “this mountain” and “Jerusalem.” Literally, Jesus tells the woman that a time is coming when her people will worship neither “in this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” Two opposing places are in view, and both are, in a sense, dismissed. By contrast, two words, “spirit” and “truth,” not only replace “this mountain” and “Jerusalem,” they also complement each other instead of opposing each other. (Whereas “this mountain” and “Jerusalem” are each introduced by the preposition “in,” a single use of the preposition governs “spirit and truth”: “neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem” vs. “in spirit and truth.”) Instead of worshipping God on Mount Gerizim or on Jerusalem, you worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Why are “spirit” and “truth” now the complementary spheres of worship? Because after his death and resurrection, Jesus, who is the truth, sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in and among the people of God.<sup>8</sup> You don't need to travel to a temple on Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion, because God isn't confined to a temple, because you are a temple, and because the people of God together are a temple. The new dynamic is thoroughly Trinitarian: you worship the

Father in spirit (in the Holy Spirit, who indwells your spirit) and truth (in the Son). The Samaritan woman is being caught up in this new dynamic, even if she neither knows what is happening to her nor understands what Jesus is talking about.

If the Father is seeking “true” worshipers, Jesus has commended her for answering his request in a “true” manner. She gives an incomplete answer, but she’s honest about her condition: “I have no husband.” Jesus, though commending her for truthfulness, is urging her to be more truthful still. To worship the Father, you have to be true: you have to be honest with yourself and with the Father. That’s what the Father seeks; that’s what he wants. Wasn’t Jesus, who is doing the work of the Father, seeking the woman? He asked her for a drink, and when she answered him truthfully, he served her a drink. Didn’t Jesus just prove, by serving the woman despite her sordid affairs, that she didn’t need to hide from the Father, that she in fact must be truthful with him? And where does the Holy Spirit come in? He helps the woman to be truthful. He is, after all, the Spirit of truth.

The woman doesn’t know what to make of all this. If Jesus spoke of an hour that “is coming,” the woman expects a Messiah who “is coming” to sort everything out. Yes, the hour is coming, but the hour is also “now here” because the Messiah is here: “I who speak to you am he.” Yes, the Messiah himself is speaking with her—not only sorting everything out for her but also serving her living water.

## Share everything with the Father

Jesus knows us, accepts us, and values us. Moreover, the Father seeks us, all his prodigal daughters and sons—that is, he seeks us as his worshipers, his true worshipers. Therefore, be truthful with yourself and with the Father about what you’ve done and about your thought-dreams. The Spirit of truth will help you. Because Jesus knows you, accepts you, and values you, you have no reason not to be truthful with yourself and the Father. The Father seeks you; he wants all of you, not part of you, and certainly not a dressed-up version of you. David Wilcox may as well be singing the words of the Father in his song “Hard Part.” Listen, and imagine that the Father is speaking to you, seeking you:

*I see the look that’s in your eye  
That says “I must keep most of me inside  
'Cause you’d never love me  
If I didn’t hide the secrets of my heart”*

*Well, I’m not here for the surface stuff  
I just get bored with all that fluff  
So show me the edges even if it’s rough  
And let the real love start*

*You think your shame and deep disgrace  
Is more than I can bear  
But you could go to your darkest place  
And I will meet you there*

*'Cause I’m strong enough to take it  
And I know what you’ve been through  
You’ve got a whole heart  
Give me the hard part  
I can love that too*

*You look at me with some surprise  
And I see the doubt that’s in your eyes  
Like something deep inside you cries  
With a hunger to be known*

*Like a tiger born in a city zoo  
There’s been no place for what’s inside of you  
You try to live like the others do  
But it leaves you so alone*

*I know you think that the heat of your pain  
Is more than I can stand  
Burn it all in one big flame  
And I will hold it in my hand*

*'Cause I’m strong enough to take it  
And I know what you’ve been through  
You’ve got a whole heart  
Give me the hard part  
I can love that too*

*Now your eyes well up with tears  
As desire mixes with your fears  
After so many wounded years  
Can you long for what you’ve missed?*

*You want a cool breeze to dance with your flame  
A long-lost lover who knows your true name  
A secret garden beyond this shame  
And it all comes down to this*

*You think your drowning hope  
Will die in a sea without a shore  
But I can drink that ocean dry  
And still come back for more*

*I’m strong enough to take it  
And I know what you’ve been through  
You’ve got a whole heart  
Give me the hard part  
I can love that too<sup>9</sup>*

Psychologist David Benner tells of feeling shame because of his sin but then discovering that the Father was seeking him nevertheless:

*Sitting with my shame in God's presence helped me see that God wasn't shocked by it. In fact, he seemed to know all about it. And he still accepted me! I became aware that whatever the shame was about, I did not need to hide from it, because God already knew about it. Sharing it with God allowed me to experience his love for a tender, vulnerable part of me.*<sup>30</sup>

As Benner shared his shame with the Father, he experienced the tender love of the Father. Or, to use Jesus' metaphor, he drank in the living water. The Father isn't here for the surface stuff, so show him the edges even if it's rough. Share everything with the Father, even your shame—especially your shame. When you pray, confess your sins, bring your thought-dreams to the Father, and let the real love start.

First, Jesus knows us. Second, the Father seeks us. Finally, serving us living water is deeply satisfying to Jesus.

## Accomplishing the work of the Father

John 4:27-42:

**<sup>27</sup>Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" <sup>28</sup>So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup>"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" <sup>30</sup>They went out of the town and were coming to him.**

**<sup>31</sup>Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." <sup>32</sup>But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup>So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. <sup>35</sup>Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. <sup>36</sup>Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup>For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."**

**<sup>39</sup>Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup>And**

**many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup>They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."**

The disciples are mystified that Jesus, breaking with custom, has been speaking with a woman. They would have been even more mystified if they had known what Jesus was saying to the woman, but they probe no further. What was the woman seeking? At first, nothing more than a bucketful of water, but she received much more. Why was Jesus talking with her? Because the Father, who sent Jesus, is seeking her.

The disciples, having returned from grocery shopping, bring Jesus something to eat, but he tells them he's been eating while they were away. Just like the woman, who took Jesus literally instead of figuratively when he spoke of water, the disciples take Jesus literally instead of figuratively when he speaks of food. Accomplishing the work of the Father in this case has been so satisfying that it has taken the place of food.

Jesus is not only eating, he's also reaping—again, figuratively. He's reaping a harvest of eternal life, in the life of the woman and in the town of Sychar. Although the disciples had no idea why Jesus was talking with the woman, they did not have the wherewithal to ask either Jesus or the woman about the encounter. Something's going on that they are unaware of, something they're not even asking about, even though they're mystified. Lift up your eyes, Jesus tells them, and pick up a sickle, so to speak. Others have planted—Jacob (the woman knew all about Jacob), Jesus, even the Samaritan woman—and it's time to reap, at a surprising time, after just one conversation with a woman at a well, and in a surprising place, a Samaritan town.

The woman leaves her water jar to tell the men of the town to come and see Jesus. Does she not return with water because she's found better water? Does telling the men about Jesus satisfy some thirst within her? If Jesus doesn't need to eat at this time because his food is "to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work," is the woman's drink to do likewise? Her drink—her work—is to tell others about Jesus. Jesus says later that rivers of living water will flow from those who drink from him (John 7:37-39). The living water now flows from the woman to her people.

The woman from Sychar wonders whether this man, who knows her so intimately, could be the Messiah, and many Samaritans believe in Jesus—indeed, the fields are white for harvest—and ask him literally to "dwell" with them, even if he is a Jew. Jesus dwells with them for two



days. After he's through, he'll dwell with whoever believes in him forever (John 14:16-17, 23). The new believers proclaim Jesus to be "the Savior of the world." Indeed, salvation for the world is from the Jews, from the Jewish Messiah.

It is a measure of our value to Jesus that serving us living water is deeply satisfying to him. We come to Jesus sometimes, like the woman from Sychar, hoping for something like a bucketful of water—some useful teaching, a little help with our problems—but we receive so much more: a Lord who knows us, who accepts us, who values us. We receive living water. This kind of encounter is so powerful that it reconstitutes our inner lives so that living water flows from us to others.

## Happily ever after

Are you thirsty to be known, to be accepted, to be valued? After so many wounded years, can you long for what you've missed? Do you want a cool breeze to dance with your flame, a long-lost lover who knows your true name? Jesus knows you and he stays with you to serve you. Share everything with the Father, even your shame, and drink in the living water: experience his love in your tender, vulnerable parts.

Jesus, like the three men in the Old Testament woman-at-the-well stories, travels to a foreign land, in his case from Jewish territory to Samaritan territory—or, in a transcendent sense, from heaven to earth. Like the others, he meets a woman at a well. Like the three women in the Old Testament stories, the Samaritan woman runs to announce the arrival of the foreigner. We know what to expect now: arrangements will be made, and Jesus will marry the Samaritan woman. Wait! No? Shockingly, there's no wedding. Then again, this woman doesn't need a husband: she's had five of them! Then again, look closer. A man, Jesus, and a woman, the woman of Sychar, get together and give spiritual birth to people in that town, and they become children of the Father. This story, in contrast to its Old Testament predecessors, has a happy ending.

Why did the Son leave heaven? If the Father left the temple, so to speak, to seek worshipers, the Son left heaven to seek a bride. He is, in fact, according to John the Baptist, "the bridegroom" (John 3:29). If Jesus is the bridegroom, who's the bride? The woman of Sychar. You. Me. All who believe in him. Together, we're the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7). Together, we're married to him. One

day, he will come again for us. He will come for his bride.

Then will come about the truest fulfillment of the old saying: And they all lived happily ever after, for we will be known and loved ever after. As we wait and pray for the bridegroom to come for us, listen to what John says in Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The Joy Luck Club* (Buena Vista Pictures, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>David Wilcox, "Hard Part" (Gizz Da Baboo, SESAC, administered by Michelle Ma Soeur, SESAC, a division of Soroka Music Ltd., and John Whalen, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Caitlin Flanagan, "Unfaithfully Yours," *Time* magazine (July 13, 2009), 45-49.

<sup>4</sup>Emily Alpert, "More Americans Living Alone, Census Bureau Finds" (*Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 2013).

<sup>5</sup>Flanagan, *Time* magazine.

<sup>6</sup>Bob Dylan, "It's All Right, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" (Warner Bros. Inc., 1965, Special Rider Music, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1997), 84.

<sup>8</sup>John elsewhere identifies Jesus as "the truth" (John 1:14, 5:33, 7:18, 14:6). Jesus baptizes people "in the Holy Spirit," and those people are born of the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-33, 3:1-5). If Jesus is the truth, the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13)—in one sense, the Spirit of Jesus. Elsewhere, John observes that God is "true" (John 3:33); here he observes that "God is Spirit," which means that no temple can confine him and also that he is the Holy Spirit.

<sup>9</sup>Wilcox, "Hard Part."

<sup>10</sup>David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 44.