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Editor's note: Welcome to [Theologians' Corner](#), where each week a different woman theologian from around the world offers a fresh reflection on the Sunday readings.



Third Sunday of Lent

[March 8, 2026](#)

The Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Lent (John 4:5-42) shares an important encounter of Jesus with the unnamed Samaritan woman at the well. The reading contains a rich diversity of themes, including thirst (which it shares with today's first reading from Exodus), encounter, recognizing the other as they are, the will of God, hope, witness and prophecy.

The richness of the reading reminds us that Scripture can nourish us on many levels. For today, let's consider three themes: thirst, encounter and hope.

First, we can imagine the great thirst of the Israelites who have been wandering the desert with Moses. Human bodies need water, and the pleas (whines) of the people betray their despair. "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" (Exodus 17:7) Their thirst exceeds their physical need. It makes them feel utterly abandoned by God, even as they continue to follow Moses' lead.

Jesus, too, is thirsty. His thirst leads him to the well of Jacob, to a place that is part of his and our Old Testament ancestry. As he sits to rest, he asks the Samaritan woman for a drink, someone with whom a good Jewish man would not generally affiliate. But he is thirsty and tired.

Her question ("How could you possibly be asking me for a drink?") makes him flip the script. He turns physical thirst to spiritual meaning as he tells the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him/her a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

While he's still physically thirsty, she begins to ask him for the living water he describes, to ease her daily work. She, too, longs for water to flow freely, like that from the rock that Moses struck. Her thirst is both physical and spiritual.

She is ready to imagine a new world, the coming of the Messiah and the beginning of the reign of God. Who could keep such hope quiet?

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The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is extraordinary, even for the Gospels. First, it is a woman and a man, populations in which strangers rarely interacted without chaperones. Alone at the well at the hottest hour of the day, the woman seems to be ostracized from the other women in her community, who drew water together in the cool of the morning. Lucky for Jesus, who needs water and has no bucket! And so their conversation begins around the need for water and the reality of human thirst.

Yet the superficial quickly becomes profound. Jesus speaks of the men in her life, husbands and not. He knows her even though they only just met. She in turn recognizes that there is something special about this man, this stranger — Jewish but willing to speak to her, offering her water that doesn't run out, and somehow able to see the things about her that she doesn't really want him to know.

The conversation turns to worship. Where are we supposed to worship God? Jesus reassures her that the times are changing, and that God seeks out those who worship in "Spirit and truth." In other words, where you worship is not important compared to complete faith in the truth of God.

The woman seems to know what he's talking about, for she says, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Like how to get living water, and how many husbands you've had!

"I am he," says the Lord.

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The story brings us to that third theme — hope. Just as Jesus' disciples arrive and notice him talking with this strange woman, she runs off to tell the town about the prophet she has met. "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?"

Hope is faith and trust in God's promises. The woman is Samaritan and knows that God promised a Messiah to the people. Despite whatever hardships she has endured in her many-husband history, she still believes that the Messiah is coming. In fact, could he be here already? Her capacity for hope keeps her heart from hardening (today's Psalm response) when she banters with him at the well. She is ready to imagine a new world, the coming of the Messiah and the beginning of the reign of God.

Who could keep such hope quiet? As Paul says in the second reading from the Letter to the Romans, "Hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." The Samaritan woman experiences the love of God in her encounter with Jesus, who knows her and still wants to drink from her jar. Her Spirit-filled heart then proclaims the good news for all to hear.

Lent prepares us for Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. But Lent only makes sense with the hope — the promise — of Easter. As we tell and retell our stories, let's allow them to sink into our bones, reminding us who we are. We are God's chosen ones, beloved, filled with the Spirit, and on fire to share the message of Jesus with those who need to hear it most.

This story appears in the [Theologians' Corner](#) and [Lent](#) feature series.