

# Living Water: Your gift is ready

Sermon for Sunday, July 11, 2010  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** John 4:4-30, 39-42; John 7:37-39

Bob McLure was a United Church doctor who worked with mission hospitals around the world. He became well known to many in Canada during the time that he was our church's Moderator. One time McLure was home on vacation, and brought with him one of his friends from India.

Munroe Scott tells some of the details of this story in his biography of Bob McLure:

Throughout much of India, water is a precious possession. People sometimes fight over the privilege of using a public well. Washing clothes and bathing people must be done with care, so that water is not wasted.

Bob and his friend toured the countryside in parts of Ontario and Quebec. It was the middle of July, and the world was green. The fresh sweet scent of hay wafted off the fields. Fat cattle grazed the rolling hills. Woodlots with plenty of timber dotted the landscape. The evergreen forest of the vast Canadian Shield stretched away beyond vision.

They passed by lakes and rivers, not just a few of them, but whole chains, finally merging with the mighty St. Lawrence River. Finally they stood on the shore of Lake Ontario. The visitor from India saw to the east and west and south, all the way to the horizon, as far as he could see, all water – fresh water!

It was more than he could believe. He walked to the shore, knelt down, cupped water in his two hands, and drank. He stared at it for a moment, then said to McClure in wonder, "God has given to Canada with both hands!"

But God offers to give us even more than mere physical water. God offers us living water.

## The precious gift

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish religion centred on the Temple in Jerusalem. Jews worshipped in synagogues in cities and villages wherever they lived. But three times a year there were special worship celebrations in the Temple in Jerusalem. All those who were able to make the trip would travel to Jerusalem for these huge assemblies, which lasted up to a week. Several hundred

thousand people would participate in these amazing worship events.

It was during one of these festivals that Jesus came to the Temple.

**John 7:37-39, New Living Translation:**

Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within." (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

Most of the people of Israel lived in the rural areas, and made their living off the land. Just like us around here, they were well aware how precious water was. So when Jesus said he would give them the Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit would be like living water, he couldn't have picked a more appealing symbol.

## The satisfying gift

Some time before this, Jesus and his disciples were travelling through the country, and stopped at a village. While the disciples went into the village to buy food, Jesus stayed by the well outside the village. Perhaps he arranged this on purpose, so that he could talk privately with a woman who came to the well to get water.

Jesus offers her this living water.

**John 4:10-15, New Living Translation:**

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, 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 is a very deep well. Where would you get this living water? And besides, are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his cattle enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me some of that water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to haul water."

She is eager to drink this living water. She doesn't appear to fully understand yet – she thinks she won't have to fetch water from the well any more. But she

certainly realized that she needs something more than what she has right now.

Is that you? Are you at the point in your life where you are thinking, “Is this all there is?” So often we have this desire, this craving for something more, but we try all the wrong things to satisfy that desire.

Let’s say this vase is my life (it’s wide at the top, narrow in the neck and wide at the bottom). I try to find satisfaction in all kinds of things: food, car, clothes, being busy at church, money (place objects representing these things in the vase, but they begin to block the opening). No matter how much stuff I cram into my life, there are still lots of gaps; I still have this feeling of emptiness.

Now what if, instead of that (take them out), I let living water fill my life (pour water from a jug into the vase). It fills every crack, every hidden hole, the smallest niche. Nothing is missed. The Holy Spirit is the gift that satisfies our deepest longing to connect with God.

### The healing gift

The woman wants this gift of living water, but there is one more thing to deal with.

John 4:16-18, New Living Translation:

“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.”

This woman had tried out five different men for husbands, and was now living with a sixth man. What on earth was her life like?!!

Imagine this was your daughter or your best friend, who always ended up with men that were going to mistreat her. She’d live with the abuse for months or even years before finally getting up the nerve to leave, but within a week she’d be hooked up with another man who was just the same as the last one. She had such low self-esteem that she figured none of the nice guys would be interested in her. She is looking desperately for satisfaction in her life, but she is looking in all the wrong places. Wouldn’t you want to grab her and shake her, and say, “Listen up! Stop doing this to yourself. You deserve better than that.”

Let’s see what happens next...

John 4:19-20, New Living Translation:

“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?”

See how she suddenly changes the subject? Jesus touched a sensitive spot in her life, and she wants to cover it up. That is perfectly normal. Let’s say your child trips and skins her knee on the ground. What is her natural instinct? She will grab hold of that knee with her hand to stop anything else from hurting it. She has covered it up so that nothing else can get close to it. Your job as the loving parent is to get her to let go, so you can dig out the pieces of gravel, wash the wound with water and soap, and put a dressing on it. I think Jesus here is trying to get her to let go of that hurt in her life, to open up and let help come in.

We don’t know much about the rest of their conversation. And we don’t need to know: those intimate details are none of our business. But we know what happened in the end...

John 4:28-30, New Living Translation:

The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, “Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

I don’t know about you, but if I met a stranger who knew all the deep dark secrets that I’ve kept hidden from everyone else, I would be very, *very* nervous. Frightened even. But here, she’s *excited* about it! Jesus talked with her about the sins in her life, and that’s a painful subject for any of us. But he did it in such a loving way that she was thrilled by that conversation.

One of the names that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit is “the Comforter” (John 14:16, in the King James Version). He is the precious gift, the satisfying gift, the healing gift – the very one that we need in our lives.

Let’s ask him now to come into our lives. Let’s pray.