

Title: "Living Water for the Journey Ahead"
6/1 Sermon – 7th Sunday of Easter (Graduate Sunday)
Rev. Lindsey Odom
Reading from the New Testament: John 4:1-42

There is something about transitions in life that make us pause and ask deeper questions. Graduation is one of those sacred moments. Whether you're finishing high school, college, trade school, or another chapter, you're standing at a threshold — a liminal space — between what has been and what is yet to come. This space often brings with it big questions, such as:

- What comes next?
- What's my purpose?
- What am I longing for?
- How can I make a difference?

Graduates, these questions, as well as your uncertainties, doubts, fears, excitement, plans, dreams, and motivation to move and change the world are not just expected — they're good. They reveal that your heart is open and your soul is paying attention. You've spent years learning, growing, and becoming, and now you are standing on the threshold of what comes next. Not only are our graduates in this position, but a lot of us are standing in between chapters, which is a space that the Bible calls "liminal," from the Latin word, *limen*, meaning threshold.

To be in a liminal moment, time, or space means you are standing at the doorway between what was and what is yet to come. Something has ended, but a new thing has not yet emerged. Graduation is more than a ceremony. It is a moment of transformation. And today is not just about honoring graduates. It's a time for all of us to reflect on the journey we've been on and the road still ahead.

In our Scripture reading from John 4, we meet someone else, who like us and like our graduates, is in a liminal space. That is the Samaritan woman at the well. Like you, she was between the life she knew and something new that God was about to do.

She came to the well at noon, which was an unusual time. She was avoiding people, possibly because of her past. But Jesus meets her right there in the heat of the day, in her loneliness and uncertainty, and starts a conversation that changes everything. Jesus, weary from travel, stops at Jacob's well, meets this Samaritan woman, and asks her for a drink. She did not understand why he was making this request and was truly puzzled. During that time period, Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Social boundaries, religious divisions, and gender roles should have kept this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman from happening. Despite the strained relations of the two regions, Jesus initiated a conversation with this Samaritan woman, breaking tradition as rabbis were not supposed to converse publicly with women. By going to well alone to draw water at noon, the hottest part of the day, showed that she intentionally wanted to avoid other women from her community. This speaks to her diminished status even among her own people. She feels isolated and unseen, but all of that changes through her encounter with Christ. Despite cultural, religious, and gender boundaries, Jesus speaks to her. Jesus sees her fully. Jesus names her story, not to shame, but to heal. Jesus crosses boundaries of gender, ethnicity, and morality to meet her where she was at and offers her living water.

Jesus's offer of living water is not just water to drink, but the kind that satisfies the soul. We see this in verses 13-14 when Jesus says: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Through this, Jesus suggests anyone who drinks of Jacob's well will be thirsty again, but the water that Jesus gives will well up, overflow and lead all of us to eternal life. This conversation moves beyond water to deeper truths. His offer of living water is the turning point.

The water that Jesus offers is the kind of water that meets our deepest needs and longings, such as the longing to be known, to be loved, to belong, and to feel purposeful. It is the water of grace, purpose, identity, and transformation. And once she encounters it, she leaves her water jar behind, the very thing she came for, and runs to tell others about Christ. So, her story doesn't end at the well; rather, it begins there. The woman who once hid from her community becomes a bold witness for Christ. Her encounter with Jesus turns her from outsider to evangelist, from shame to joy, from emptiness to purpose.

Because of her encounter with Jesus, she was profoundly transformed and moved from isolation to witness, from shame of her past to boldness, from confusion and uncertainty to understanding, from emptiness and longings to fulfillment, and from the margins of society to having purpose in spreading the good news of Christ. She had come for physical water, but leaves her jar behind after receiving something far greater, which is living water, the very presence and being of Christ. Her deep thirst, her emotional, spiritual, social and physical longings are finally satisfied in and through Christ.

This liminal space, these in between moments, like the ones that we might currently be in or the one that our graduates are in, is where God does some of God's most powerful work. It may feel uncertain, confusing, and maybe even lonely as you consider the path ahead and what this next chapter holds for you, but my hope is this.... My hope is that you know and can trust and experience that you are not just stepping into something new from your liminal space or moment that you are in, but you are stepping into a calling, a life shaped by the living water that Jesus offers to all of us. This is a life that is shaped and sustained by God's grace - a grace that meets us exactly where we are and leads us into becoming who we are called and created to be as God's beloved child. In this kind of life, identity comes not from what we do, but from whose

you are. It is a life where your identity is not earned, but given because we belong to God. We belong to God, and God's grace is the foundation on which we can build a life that is meaningful, faithful, and full of hope. So by accepting, trusting, and leaning into the living water Christ offers, we receive a life rooted in Christ' love, guided by Christ' purposes, and open to transformation far beyond what the world measures as success, just like the Samaritan woman experienced at the well.

While the world will continue to offer us plenty of "wells," sources we turn to for fulfillment that will ultimately leave us thirsty again, Christ will not. Some of these worldly "wells" include the well of achievement, the well of approval, the well of perfectionism, the well of busyness and constant stimulation, the well of success and recognition, the well of wealth and materialism, the well of popularity, in regards to our image, and appearance, the well of relationships, the well of control and fixated outcomes, the well of entertainment and escape, and the well of distraction from deeper needs/ longings, but none of these "wells" will truly satisfy. These wells will always leave us thirsty again. Only Christ satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts. Only Christ gives water that becomes a spring of life within us.

So, do not worry if you don't have it all figured out. The Samaritan woman did not, and yet her story was transformed. What mattered most was not what she brought to Jesus, but what Jesus offered to her. Maybe today you are thirsty for something more, something deeper. Maybe you're thirsting for peace and assurance in the midst of fear, worry, or anxiety. Maybe you're longing for true friendship and a sense of belonging in a world that often feels isolating. Perhaps you're thirsting for financial security or stability, unsure how ends will meet or what tomorrow will bring. Maybe you are thirsting for healing from grief, heartbreak, or trauma—carrying silent wounds that others don't see. Maybe you are thirsting for justice and a sense of peace amidst the

world's daily news. Maybe you are thirsting for clarity and purpose, wondering which path to take. Maybe you are thirsting for forgiveness, weighed down by shame or regret. Or maybe you are thirsty for rest in your life that feels overrun by busyness, expectation, and exhaustion.

Whatever your thirst is, it is not something to hide or push away. Do not ignore your thirsts; rather, let them lead you to Christ. Your thirsts and longings are not signs of weakness; rather, they are doorways to encounter Christ more fully. They are invitations to encounter the One who truly satisfies. In Jeremiah 29:11–13, God says: *“For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you a future and a hope. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* Those words were spoken to people living in a liminal space, caught between exile and home. And they are true for us today.

Whatever comes next — new schools, jobs, places, or people, know this: you do not go alone. Christ goes with you, not just into your future, but into your in-between (liminal) moments too. Jesus is with you when the path is clear and when it's uncertain. This should add comfort and a sense of peace to the actions we take, dreams we fulfill, and the decisions we make, knowing that every step we take, we are accompanied by Christ who is always with us. Jesus is the well that never runs dry, the love that never lets go. Our benediction response for today reminds us of who we are, whose we are, and of Christ' abundant love for us when it says, “a child at home in God's embrace; remember who you are.”

When you root your identity in Christ, you will find that even in the unknown, you are known, even in your moments when you want to avoid everyone and everything, you are accepted and loved, and even in just the ordinary moments, God sees the extraordinary in you and is your biggest cheerleader. In Christ, your worth is not earned—it's given. Your story is not overlooked—it's being woven by the One who calls you His own. Like the woman at the well,

allow Jesus to meet you, offer you living water and a relationship that satisfies our deepest thirsts - our longings, needs, and desires/ wants. Just as Jesus Christ offered living water to the woman at the well, he also offers it to us. When you drink of Him, you will thirst no more. Like the Woman at the Well, we are also invited to be drenched in this living water.

God has called each of us to live out love, to walk by faith, and to share the hope we have received in Christ, just like the Samaritan woman did. Our lives are a reflection of God's love in the world, and how we choose to walk through this next chapter will be our offering to God and to the world. How we walk through this next chapter – how we love, how we serve, how we trust, will become our offering: to God, and to everyone who watches our lives unfold. Just like the Samaritan woman at the well, our story, no matter where it began, continues to be written, and can become a powerful testimony of grace. The Samaritan woman left the well not with shame, but with a mission. She ran to her community, not to prove something, but to proclaim someone. And we are called to do the same.

So as you step into what's next, do so with trust. Your story is still being written, and the One writing it is faithful. Like the Samaritan woman, your past does not define your future, and your life can become a testimony to God's grace, God's love, and God's transformation.

As we go forth from worship today, remember your life, lived in response to Christ's love, can be a powerful offering to God and to the world. Walk forward with purpose, with faith, and with the confidence that wherever you go, Christ goes with you. Thanks be to God, Amen.