



## Living Water, Walking Wet

by Karen G. Bockelman

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Hymn

“Come to Me, All Pilgrims Thirsty,”

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 777*

“Come to me, all pilgrims thirsty; drink the water I will give.  
If you knew what gift I offer, you would come to me and live.”

*Refrain:*

Jesus, ever-flowing fountain, give us water from your well.  
In the gracious gift you offer there is joy no tongue can tell.

“Come to me, all trav’lers weary; come that I may give you rest.  
Drink the cup of life I offer; at this table be my guest.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, believers burdened; find refreshment in this place.  
Come, receive the gift I offer, turn to me and seek my face.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, repentant sinners; leave behind your guilt and shame.  
Come and know divine compassion, turn to me, I call your name.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, distressed and needy; I would be your trusted friend.  
Come and seek the gift I offer, come, your open hands extend.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, abandoned, orphaned; lonely ways no longer roam.  
Come and take the gift I offer, let me make in you my home.”

*Refrain*

#### Opening

*The leader addresses the group.*

Do you desire to affirm your baptism?

*The group responds.*

**I do.**

Do you renounce the devil and  
all the forces that defy God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the powers of this  
world that rebel against God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the ways of  
sin that draw you from God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe.**

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,  
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,  
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,  
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,  
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

**I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.**

(Affirmation of Baptism, text reprinted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 234-237  
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## Lake Effect

Washington Island lies off the tip of Door County, Wisconsin. One of the most striking sights on the island is Schoolhouse Beach. I've seen sandy beaches. I've seen the pebbly beaches of Lake Superior. But never before have I seen a beach covered with smooth, round white stones—washed, rolled, tumbled, polished for God only knows how long in the waters of Lake Michigan.

The first time I saw the stones, I identified with them. I, too, had spent a lifetime in the waters—the waters of baptism. I wanted so badly to pick out just the right stone and take it home, a reminder of the experience and what it meant to me. That is, until someone pointed out the sign announcing a \$25 fine for taking rocks from the beach! I had to be satisfied with a photo and the memory.

I have come to realize that the rocks need to stay in and by the water, ever shaped by the waves. In just the same way, I need to stay in and near the waters of baptism, ever shaped by the covenant God made with me in holy baptism. It will be a lifelong process.

## Sharing

> Can you think of an event that has had a deep impact on your life? An event that has continued to shape your life, or perhaps changed your life? What does that feel like? How would you be different if that hadn't happened?

## Living Water

One of the most vivid scenes in John's Gospel tells of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. We have all too often gotten stuck on the woman's supposedly shady past, but the story is about much more than that.

## READ JOHN 4:1-15.

Jesus' first spoken words in John's Gospel (1:35) are a question: "What are you looking for?" This is perhaps the unspoken question at the beginning of his conversation with the Samaritan woman. What is she looking for? Certainly she has questions of her own, religious questions, even theological questions: How is it that a Jew would ask a drink of a Samaritan woman? Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than Jacob who gave us this well?

There's a part of her conversation with Jesus that focuses on the practicalities of her daily trek to get water. The well where they met was located on the edge of town, a long and inconvenient journey. It was deep, not easy to draw from. Who wouldn't want to know about an easier source of daily water?

But the conversation quickly takes on deeper meaning with Jesus' talk of living water, gushing up to eternal life.

## READ JOHN 4:16–29.

It is the talk about many husbands that has led more than one commentator to focus on the woman's past. Some consider her words to Jesus a smokescreen to keep him from probing too deeply or even an attempt to seduce him. It may be that the obvious is true, and indeed she was the village scandal. Others have suggested that she was unable to have children, and this led one man after another to divorce her until finally, still needing a man to survive in a patriarchal society, she didn't even seek the courtesy of marriage. Still others contend that the husbands are not literal, but symbols of Samaritan infidelity, worshiping many false gods instead of the true God of Israel.

Whatever the truth of her life—religious, sexual, or otherwise—she continued in genuine dialogue with Jesus. She identified Jesus as a prophet, recognized the truth of worship in spirit rather than place. She longed for the coming of Messiah, who would proclaim all things. To this woman, and for the first time in John's Gospel, Jesus revealed himself as that Messiah.

### Sharing

- > *What do you think the Samaritan woman was looking for? What kinds of needs are described in the opening hymn? What are you looking for? How is Jesus living water for you?*

### Walking Wet

There are certainly baptismal themes in this story. There is catechesis—religious instruction—in the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well. Although Jesus does not baptize her, he does promise the gift of living water. Her response is to leave her water jar and return to the city to testify to her experience. I like to imagine her rushing off with drops of water still clinging to her skirts and splattering among the people of her town.

Later in John's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the festival of Booths or Tabernacles (John 7). Part of

the celebration included the daily carrying of a golden pitcher of water to the Temple, reminding the people of the water God provided in the wilderness and looking forward to the day when all nations would come to worship on God's holy mountain. On the last day of the festival, Jesus, who had been teaching in the Temple, stood and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37b–38).

If Jesus is indeed living water for a thirsty world, can we his followers be anything less? We are called not just to be faithful disciples in church, but to live our faith in the world: to proclaim the Good News, to serve all people, to strive for peace and justice. These are our baptismal promises, promises we renewed together at the beginning of this session.

This is our Christian vocation, our calling. Home and school, community and nation, work and leisure, citizen, friend, colleague, family—all are places and relationships where God has called us to witness and to serve.

### Sharing

- > *Think again of what you (and others) are looking for. What are the needs you shared? How are you called to meet those needs for others?*

### Holy Water

#### READ MATTHEW 25:31–46.

In this familiar scene of judgment, Jesus identifies his followers as those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited the imprisoned, and—notice—*given drink to the thirsty*. We give of ourselves. We are called to be a cup of cool water for one another.

In some traditions, water that is set aside and blessed for use in baptism is called holy water. I would prefer to say that all water is holy. It is holy because it

is God's creation. It is holy because it sustains life. It is holy because God has chosen it to be a visible sign of grace. It is holy because Jesus speaks of himself as living water.

There is a water crisis in the world today. More than a billion people in the world have no access to safe drinking water. Many women and girls must walk as much as six miles every day to get water for their families. The southeastern United States has experienced the worst drought in a century. Elsewhere in our nation, water tables have been dropping, sometimes precipitously. Battles over water—both at home and abroad—are likely to be the source of major conflict in the century ahead.

### Consider

How might you (personally, as a group, as a congregation) engage in learning about and taking action on water issues?

- Collect newspaper, magazine, and Internet stories related to water issues. Look for local, regional, national, and international stories.
- Do an “audit” of your personal, family, and congregation water consumption. Covenant with one another to make some changes toward a wiser use of water resources.
- Staff a water station at a local event (such as a marathon or outdoor concert.)
- Clean up a nearby stream bed or lake shore.
- Check out the ELCA Good Gifts Catalog or the Lutheran World Relief Catalogue for giving ideas related to water.
- See the Women of the ELCA Web site for programs and initiatives related to water. Go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).

### Closing

Gather around or turn your attention to the bowl and pitcher of water, along with the empty glasses. Take

turns pouring a small glass of water for one another, offering it with these or similar words: “Receive Christ's living water; be water for others.” Let the extra glass of water represent those beyond your group who are in need of the water you give.

Give thanks for this time together and pray that your study, sharing, and learning may bear fruit in the days to come. Pray for those who witness and serve in Christ's name and for your own opportunities to do so. Pray for the needs that have been shared in this gathering. Pray for those who experience drought or flood, those who do not have access to clean water, those caught in water conflicts. Pray for the healing of God's creation, especially God's gift of water.

And in closing, if you wish, you may read or sing the opening hymn again.

### Looking Ahead

In the next issue, we begin our nine-month study “The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther.” To learn more, see “What's Coming Up in *LWT*” on page 14. 🌿

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