

Living Water : Grace for the Thirsty Soul (John 4:5-42)

Today, I want to share the stories of two women. One is from a Russian short novel called *The Darling*, and the other is from the Gospel of John—the Samaritan woman at the well. These two women lived in completely different times and places, but they had one thing in common: They kept looking for fulfillment in the wrong places.

Their stories invite us to reflect on our own lives. Where do we find our meaning? What are we looking for to satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts?

Olenka’s Story: A Woman Who Lived for Others

Olenka, the main character in *The Darling*, is a sweet and loving woman. People around her love her so much that they call her “Darling.” But there is something missing in Olenka’s life—she has no identity of her own. She always needs someone to love, and each time she falls in love, she completely absorbs that person’s world. First, she marries a theater owner. She talks like him, thinks like him, and even repeats his words about the theater. But their love story ends in tragedy—her husband dies suddenly. She grieves, but not for long. Within three months, her heart is possessed by a new affection. Soon, she marries a businessman, and now, she forgets about the theater completely. She takes on his life, his values, his opinions. Then, tragedy strikes again—he dies too.

Next, she becomes attached to Jack, a veterinarian. Once again, she adopts his interests, talking about animals and medicine as if they were her own passion. But their happiness doesn’t last long—he moves to another city, leaving Olenka completely alone. Then, Jack returns with his family. Olenka pours all her love into his young son. Finally, she finds meaning in taking care of this child. But deep inside, she is terrified—what if she loses him too? Olenka’s problem isn’t that she loves people—it’s that she builds her entire identity around them. She needed someone else to give her purpose.

The Samaritan Woman: A Woman Trapped by Circumstances

When we hear about her story, many assume she was immoral—someone who had five husbands because she was chasing after love. But what if her story is not just about personal choice? What if her past was shaped by her culture, her society, and circumstances beyond her control?

In her time, women had very few rights: A woman could not divorce a man, but a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason—if she burned his food, if she couldn’t have children, or simply if he didn’t like her anymore. If a woman’s husband died, she had to remarry because women couldn’t own property or earn a living on their own. If she had

been widowed or divorced multiple times, she was seen as unwanted, rejected, and disgraceful. This wasn't just about personal choices—this was about a broken system that left her with no options. But She had been cast aside by a community that judged her without knowing her full story. That's why she came to the well alone at noon—the hottest part of the day—to avoid judgment from other women. It is a clear sign that she was an outcast. She wasn't just a woman with a messy past—she was a woman carrying the weight of rejection, loss, and survival.

The Transformation: Jesus Meets Her Where She Is

A Jewish man wasn't supposed to talk to a Samaritan woman. Jews considered Samaritans unclean, so they did not mix. A rabbi speaking to a woman alone? That was breaking a major cultural rule. But Jesus breaks that barrier down: Jesus saw her. Jesus spoke to her. Jesus treated her with dignity when no one else would. For the first time, someone acknowledged her worth, not as a woman shaped by her circumstances but as a person deeply loved by God. She was not just rejected by her community—she had also been told that she could never truly belong to God. Jesus invites her to be part of his ministry.

She found the true well—the living water of Jesus Christ. Jesus invited her to a new identity—not as a rejected woman, but as a beloved worshiper of the Father. Living water was an invitation to restoration, to belonging, to being fully known and fully loved. The woman who once hid from people now ran into the village, telling everyone about Jesus. The woman who had been hiding now had a purpose. The woman who had been rejected now had something to offer.

Living water changed everything.

Jesus wasn't offering just spiritual knowledge—He was offering a complete renewal of her life. The Samaritan woman found her security and true identity in Christ, who is created, forgiven and loved by God.

What If Jesus Met Olenka? Imagine if Jesus showed up in Olenka's story.

“Olenka, do you live to please everybody? Does the fear of disappointing others leave you feeling trapped? Let me show you a different way—where your worth isn't determined by people's approval, but by the One who created you.”

Jesus invited her to drink from the living water—to find her identity in God alone. She is no longer just a darling. She is Olenka, a child of God, fully known and fully loved.

What This Means for Us

Their stories remind us of this timeless truth: No matter how we seek fulfillment, true satisfaction comes only from the living water that Jesus offers.

The famous philosopher Blaise Pascal once said:

“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

Lent is a season when we are invited to pause, reflect, and recognize the ways we have sought fulfillment in things that do not satisfy—whether in relationships, success, approval, or material possessions.

Like Olenka and the Samaritan woman, many of us search for meaning in the wrong places, yet we remain restless.

Saint Augustine put it this way in *Confessions* (Book 1, Chapter 1):

“Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

This is a time to lay down our false sources of security and to turn back to God, the only One who can fully satisfy us. We are invited simply to be with God—Not striving to feel good. Not searching for answers. Not trying to do more. Instead, we are called to rest in His presence, find comfort in His love, and abide in Him.

Lent is a time to rediscover where our hearts truly belong.

As Jesus said:

“Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.” (John 4:13-14)

Let us stop chasing after things that will never satisfy and start drinking from the living water that Jesus freely offers.