

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, meet us at the well today. Name what is true in us without crushing us. Give us living water. Form us into a steady, holy people whose love holds under pressure. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by a gifted English woman who lived only forty-three years. Despite fragile health, Sarah Flower Adams lived an accomplished life, she even spent time on the London stage as Lady MacBeth before turning to writing. Her hymn has carried an unusual history of comfort for hurting people, not because it is sentimental, but because it tells the truth about need and then points beyond need to presence.

This hymn draws its imagery from Jacob’s wilderness moment at Bethel. Jacob lies down with a stone for a pillow, and in the night God meets him—angels ascending and descending, and a promise that God is nearer than Jacob imagined (Genesis 28:10–22, NIV). Jacob wakes and names the place Bethel—“the house of God”—because in his deepest uncertainty he discovers something steady: God’s nearness.

This captures a common yearning—especially in times of deep need—not merely to *believe* that God exists, but to *experience* God’s presence as real. And that longing is exactly where Lent meets us. Holy longing is not a problem to solve; it’s an invitation to come to the Well.

Exodus 17:1–7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1–11; John 4:5–42 (NIV)

OPENER:

Friends, everybody knows what thirst feels like.

Thirst is not just a physical sensation... It’s a pressure. It narrows your vision, shortens your patience, and can turn reasonable people reactive. When you’re thirsty, you start thinking in urgent categories: **now, quick, fix it, who’s responsible, why didn’t someone plan better.**

Have you ever gone to a faucet (or even a well) expecting water, only to find nothing comes out? The place is right. The habit is familiar. But the life isn’t flowing. And what surprises you is how quickly the dryness starts talking. It starts narrating your day. It starts steering your mood. It starts making decisions for you.

Lent gives us a holy word for this: **holy longing**. It is the ache beneath the ache—the deep desire that asks, like thirst, *how do I satisfy this longing?*

*Let’s look at scripture, the **psalms** are not embarrassed by that question. They don’t scold longing; they name it and aim it.*

KEY POINT:

When I thirst for God, my thoughts become Psalm 42.

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1, NIV).

And here's the refrain we're going to return to today—because it's the flow of holiness in one sentence:

God's Prevenient grace awakens thirst; justifying grace gives peace; sanctifying grace becomes a spring; missional grace turns thirst into witness.

And friends, **that's why Jesus meets us at a well.**

But before we arrive at Jacob's well in John 4, we need to look into a wilderness where thirst reveals what is in us.

Exodus 17: Real thirst, and what thirst can do to a community

Israel is in the wilderness. They have real need. They are not pretending. Their thirst is not imaginary. But watch what happens as the pressure rises.

Thirst turns into complaint. Complaint turns into accusation. **And accusation turns into testing God.**

It's not just, "We need water." It becomes, "*Is God with us or not?*" That is what stressed systems do. They take a real need and turn it into a referendum on God's faithfulness, and then they look for a target to carry the anxiety.

That's how you get the wilderness question: *Who is responsible? Moses, what have you done? God, prove yourself.*

And yet God provides water anyway (this is mercy). Water comes from the rock. Grace meets them before maturity. God meets them in their thirst. God does not wait until they become calm and spiritually impressive.

This is not only a **miracle story**. It's a **formation story**. God is training a people to trust God's presence more than their panic. This is God showing them: *You can be thirsty and still be held. You can be needy and still be led. You can be unsettled and still be provided for.*

Which is why Psalm 95 speaks so plainly. Because the real danger isn't thirst. The danger is what thirst can do to the heart.

Psalm 95: The warning is not about thirst; it's about hardness

Psalm 95 says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Psalm 95:7–8, NIV).

That line is not God shaming thirsty people. It is God warning thirsty people. Thirst is human. Hardness is spiritual resistance. Need is not the problem. The problem is when need becomes a kind of inner rigidity, when we decide in advance that the only safe path is control. But really this is God cannot be trusted, people cannot be trusted...

And here is where Friends spirituality gives us a beautiful, simple practice: we come to God without performing. We come to God without pretending. We come to God open-handed. We

wait. We listen. We let the Lord name what is true. Not because we're passive, but because we refuse substitutes.

So let me give you a little litany—three lines to carry this week. Not as a spiritual “to-do list.” More like a compass for holy longing.

One — When I thirst for God, my thoughts become Psalm 42.

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1, NIV).

Two — When the land feels dry, my desire becomes Psalm 63.

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you in a dry and weary land” (Psalm 63:1, NIV).

Three — When I don't know what to do next, I become Psalm 130.

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope” (Psalm 130:5, NIV).

That's the opposite of hardness. That is openness. That is the heart staying tender under pressure. And Paul tells us why that tenderness is possible—because in Christ, God has already moved toward us with peace.

Romans 5: Peace with God, and love poured into the heart

Paul says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1, NIV).

Notice the order. First, God reconciles. Then peace becomes the ground. Then endurance and hope can grow. Lent is not about trying to manufacture holiness by force. Lent is about receiving the peace of God so deeply that our reactivity starts to lose its grip.

And then Paul gives us one of the most living-water lines in the whole Bible: “God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5, NIV).

Poured out. Not rationed. Not earned. Not scraped together by willpower. Poured out. The Spirit does not just give us a new set of rules; the Spirit gives us a new inner capacity—new resilience, new steadiness, new tenderness that can tell the truth without turning cruel.

So here it is again—this is the flow:

Prevenient grace awakens thirst; justifying grace gives peace; sanctifying grace becomes a spring; missional grace turns thirst into witness.

And that brings us right where we started.

That's why Jesus meets us at a well.

John 4: Jesus meets a person, not a project

John tells us Jesus is tired. He sits down. It's ordinary. It's human... And then Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.

That's more than a conversation starter. That's a boundary-crossing moment. People have reasons not to speak to strangers: social reasons, moral reasons, cultural reasons. But Jesus is not managing appearances. Jesus is present.

And what I love about Jesus here is that he is truthful without being harsh. He does not flatter. He does not shame. He does not avoid. He tells the truth in a way that opens a door instead of slamming it.

Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again" (John 4:13, NIV). And then he makes a promise that sounds like the gospel itself: "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (John 4:14, NIV).

He's not saying Christians never experience longing again. He's saying the **source** changes. The supply changes. The center changes.

And then this line, this is holiness language: the living water becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NIV). A Spring. Not a one-time sip. Not a religious mood.

Friends, Jesus doesn't just hand her a drink; he puts a spring in her.

That is sanctifying grace: not mere restraint, not mere moral effort, but Christ's own life rising within a person over time: steadying them, cleansing them, strengthening them, making them more truthful and more loving at the same time.

And notice what happens next. The spring turns outward.

Closing: From holy longing to witness—"Come, see"

She goes back to town. She speaks. She invites. She doesn't lead with polish. She leads with honesty and an invitation. She doesn't say, "I have it all figured out." She says, in effect, *Come and see*.

That is missional grace: love on the move. Not rivalry, not argument, not performance. Witness. A life that has met Jesus and cannot keep quiet about it.

So I want to end where we began, with that image that keeps us from turning longing into shame.

Holy longing is not a problem to solve; it's an invitation to come to the Well.

And here is the refrain one last time—let it settle into you as a prayer:

Prevenient grace awakens thirst; justifying grace gives peace; sanctifying grace becomes a spring; missional grace turns thirst into witness.

Friends, where are you thirsty right now? And where are you tempted to harden—toward God, toward others, toward yourself?

Let the psalms guide you this week:

When I thirst for God, my thoughts become Psalm 42 (Psalm 42:1, NIV).

When the land feels dry, my desire becomes Psalm 63 (Psalm 63:1, NIV).

When I don't know what to do next, I become Psalm 130 (Psalm 130:5, NIV).

And as you come—quietly, honestly—hear Jesus' promise again: "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (John 4:14, NIV).

Amen.