

"Happily Ever After"

Text: John 4:5-26,28-29, 39

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in knowing that the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ has paid the full penalty for your sins, and that you even now – at this very moment – stand holy, faultless, blameless in his sight. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, do you know anyone at all that doesn't love a "happily ever after" story? The hero and heroine beat all the odds, overcome all obstacles and opposition, and, in the end, ride off into the sunset to live *happily ever after*. What's not to love? I'm not even sure exactly why that sort of thing makes us happy – given the fact that we all know it's just fake. Not only is the story usually just a figment of someone's imagination, nothing in this world lasts. How silly, when you think about it, to imagine that the couple that could never stop fighting before they got married, suddenly never fought again after they rode off into the sunset. Or that someone that survived almost certain death didn't eventually die.

In fact there is only one class of people who have any realistic expectation of living happily ever after - Christians. That means, by definition, that there has to be an event, a beginning or start, before anyone can ever have *happily ever after*. In the case of Christianity, that event is conversion. Every human being needs to be converted – brought to saving faith by God the Holy Spirit. There can be no "after" if there is no "now," and that "now" requires exposure to the Word of God.

Make-believe and reality do have one thing in common. That necessary "now" event usually involves confrontation, and our society mostly abhors confrontation. At least the sort of confrontation necessary for true *happily ever after*. How ironic that the society that adores "happily ever after" refuses the means to get there.

Our national mindset seems to be slouching toward the silly notion that all pain and discomfort of every kind can and should be eliminated from life. Human beings should never have to do anything they don't want to do – nothing that they find arduous or unpleasant. If I find work too difficult, others should be made to supply both what I need *and* what I want. It takes too much work to bathe and dress myself, so why can't I just go to Wal-Mart unwashed and in my pajamas? Exercise is hard, so they need to just come up with a pill that will allow me to eat whatever I want, as much as I want, remain sedentary, and still be physically fit and healthy.

It was therefore inevitable that this silly, detached-from-reality mindset

would eventually seep also into mankind's religious convictions. Modern religion, to many, now means never having to say no to any natural impulse or desire. Nor should anyone else ever tell me that what I am doing is wrong. That sort of thing is hurtful, and therefore represents the worst sin imaginable in the new "Religion of No Discomfort." Condemnation usually stings, and since we should never hurt anyone, we must never condemn. Even when God does.

This is the area we are going to examine in light of our text for this morning, the concept of "happily ever after," but focusing on the question "happily ever after...what?" That text is the Word of God found recorded in the Fourth Chapter of the Gospel of John:

^{ESV} **John 4:5-26, 28-29, 39** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ ¶ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶ ¶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the

hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? ³⁹ ¶ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

This is God's Words. In humble reverence, and asking the God who gave us these words to work powerfully through those words in our hearts this morning, we pray, **"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Like it or not, screens have changed our world. It is an established fact that an alarming percentage of our society today is much more comfortable being isolated on their phones than they are interacting with real, live human beings. Since human beings will always be *influenced* by something, the inevitable conclusion is that screen-gazers are being influenced by whatever appears on their screens – a truly disturbing reality.

One thing screeniacs certainly learn is how to talk like the world, and to adopt the world's idea of group-think wisdom. For example, have you ever heard the expression *"Don't go there!"* Probably more times than you care to remember. Hollywood loves it, and whatever they love they use, and whatever they use, screen-gazers tend to adopt. It's used when someone refuses to talk about something that is uncomfortable, embarrassing, or in some way hurtful or accusatory. The underlying thought of *"Don't go there!"* is not whether the thing they don't want to talk about is right or wrong. The point is simply that the person doesn't want to talk about it. They would rather pretend the problem doesn't exist, which of course they find much less stressful.

There is nothing in God's Word that leads us to believe that Jesus bought into the notion of *"Don't go there."* In fact just the opposite is true - and it's not that he was ignorant of the concept. He just recognized it for the nonsense that it was and is. His entire life Jesus had to deal with others telling him, *"Don't go there!"* The devil's final temptation in the wilderness was essentially one big *"Don't go there."* *"Suffering and dying to save the world? Don't go there. Worship me and I'll give it all to you without all that pain and misery."*

But Jesus always did *"go there,"* didn't he – even when it caused him abject misery (the full horror of which is beyond our comprehension.) The first *"don't go there"* might well have been Satan's opposition to the incarnation – Jesus entry into our world at Christmas. The devil knew that mankind had one chance at happily ever after. Jesus had to come to earth to pay our sin debt. Mankind had to be *rescued*. Not enabled, not guided, not empowered. Rescued. For that to happen, Jesus had to leave the perfection of heaven, place himself under the demands of the law by being born a human being, live a perfect life, and then offer that life to pay what mankind could not. Satan's counsel would almost certainly have been: *"Don't go there."* Jesus went.

Yet another *"don't go there"* came from the mouths of *Jesus' own disciples*. They begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Pleaded with him not to offer his life in payment for their sins. Implored him not to walk the path to the cross and thus open heaven's door for mankind. And why not? Because that way was much too difficult, far too painful, way too unpleasant. Jesus went.

This morning our text demonstrates just how important it is that we do as Jesus did. It involves Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well – a woman who had had five husbands and was, when Jesus met her, living in sin with a man who was not her husband.

Can you imagine what our society today would have said to Jesus the moment he began to contemplate bringing up such a disagreeable subject? They would have shouted, in deafening unison, *"Don't go there!"* They would have pleaded, threatened, picketed, looted, Facebooked, LinkedIn'd – anything and everything to shame him into not going there. They would have screamed at him, *"Don't judge!"* Jesus went there anyway, which ought to be highly instructive. He dove in, all in, head first. He began with a simple, ***"Go call your husband."*** And he followed up by simply dragging her shameful sin into the light of day: ***"You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."***

How could Jesus have made such a mistake? How could he have stumbled so clumsily into what was obviously a most disagreeable and uncomfortable confrontation? How could he have committed so

great a social faux pas? Didn't he know how the game was played? Didn't he know that he was supposed to just pretend that nothing was happening, everything was fine, and to act and speak as if all was well? Jesus obviously knew all that the world expected of him in that situation. The fact that he brought up the problem anyway teaches us a vital lesson. He loved this woman – loved her so much that what he wanted for her was the genuine happily ever after. Because of that love, he wouldn't allow her to slide quietly into the fire of eternal torment. He knew full well that saving faith cannot coexist in a heart that has given itself over to sin. Her sin was a cancer that had to be excised if she was to survive. Unpleasant in the extreme, but necessary.

The woman's reaction is typical. She did what most of us sinners do when first confronted with our sins: she tried to change the subject, rationalize, or, better yet, attack her accuser. The woman, no doubt ashamed, seems to try a combination of all three: **"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."** What in the world does this have to do with the woman's five husbands and live-in boyfriend? Nothing at all. That's the point. The woman here rolls a rationalization, an accusation, and a change of the subject all into one big evasion. In effect she is telling Jesus that she would like to repent and change her ways, but she can't because the religious leaders (including Jesus himself) have her so confused about whether she needs to go to Jerusalem or to Samaria to repent. In her sin-enslaved mind she is actually blaming Jesus for her ongoing sin. Since he is a prophet, he is a spiritual leader and therefore a part of the problem that's keeping her from changing her ways. It's just not her fault.

Jesus proceeds to tear down all of the woman's defenses; to redirect all of her diversions. Finally, having had all of the many layers of deception and denial stripped away, the Master knows when the law has done its work, for the woman turns to the heart of the matter: **"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."** Sometimes Jesus chose to speak in parables. Sometimes in riddles, such as: **"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."** Here Jesus recognizes not only that the law has done its work in the woman (that she has been crushed under the weight of her sin) but also that his time with her is short. As a result he takes a rather rare direct approach with her and gives the woman one of the clearest and most direct statements we find in the Bible up to this point in Jesus' life as to his true identity: **"I who speak to you am He."**

Because Jesus went there, and only because he went there, the end of our text is a genuine "happily ever after." The seed (the law and gospel

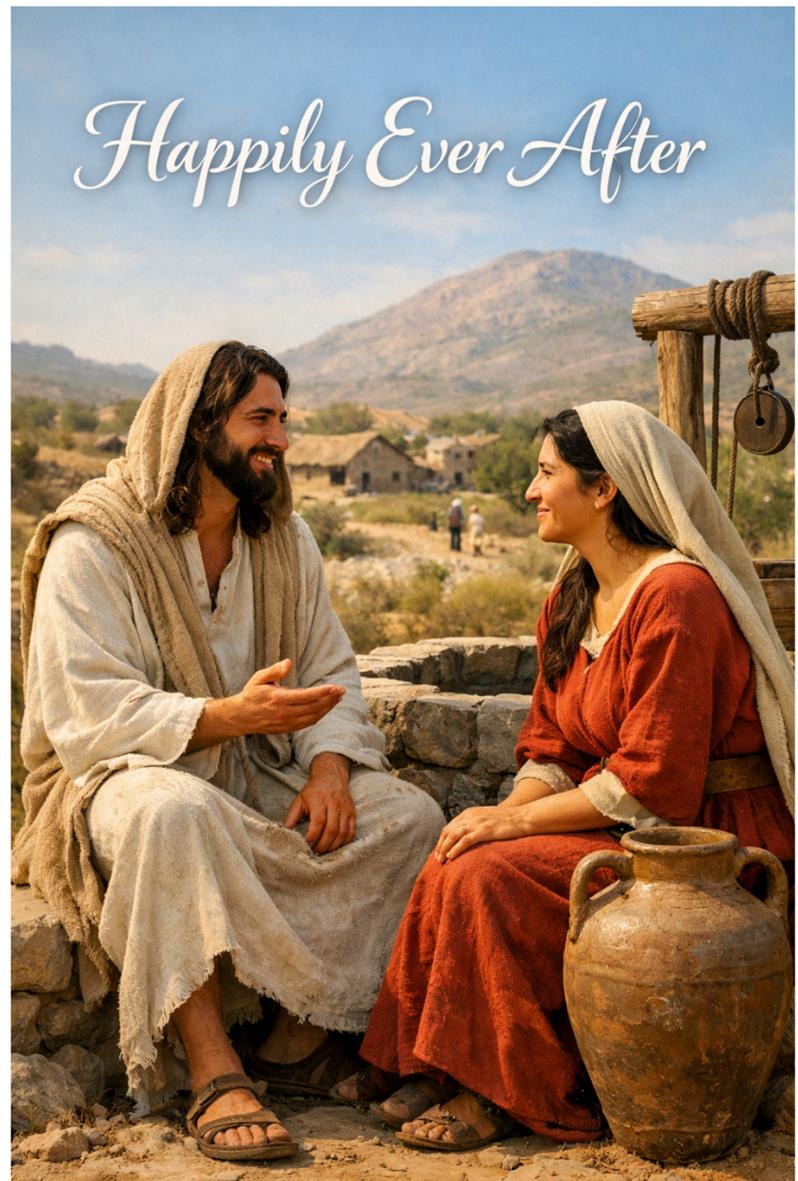
planted by Jesus) came to life in the Samaritan woman. She became not only Christian but a missionary among her own people. Through the testimony of this one woman, the first of what could well have been many generations was brought to faith and rescued. Truly this is one of the greatest studies found in the Bible on how to reach those who are dying; yet if you break it down into its basic components, what do you find? Simple law and gospel – the very same tools we have been given to carry out this same work today – and the courage to actually use those tools.

In the end, happily ever after is exactly what Christianity is all about, but "ever after" what? Ever *after* needs a *now* – a change from what has been. For sinful, rebellious human beings that means conversion, and conversion requires not just the gospel but also the confrontation and condemnation of the law. That means that you and I need to reach out to those caught up in sin not just with the gospel but also with the law - because the gospel has no meaning or relevance until the law has done its work. That's what makes possible the "happily ever after." Be part of that solution. Amen.

^{ESV} **Exodus 17:1-7** All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

^{ESV} **Romans 5:1-8** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

^{ESV} **John 4:5-26, 28-29, 39** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ ¶ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶ ¶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁹ ¶ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.



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The Third Sunday in Lent – March 8, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 135

"Christ Is Our Cornerstone"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff.

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Exodus 17:1-7) Our physical needs often short circuit our understanding of our spiritual needs. This was demonstrated clearly in the events of our first lesson this morning, where the Israelites were willing to sacrifice their ethics and morality because of their thirst. Don't make the mistake of imagining that these words were written so that we could sit in judgment of those long dead. This lesson has been preserved for, and is to be applied to the lives of, the living. The very same temptation afflicts each one of us here today.

Psalm 51 *(Hymnal page 75)*

The Second Lesson: (Romans 5:1-8) "Peace with God" is one of the many gifts that Christians tend to take for granted – as is the access to God that is now ours by virtue of this peace. Jesus did that for us by removing that which had separated us from our God – our sins. What Jesus had to do to reconcile us to God was anything but easy. So too we should anticipate a life on earth that is filled with struggle and, at times, great hardship and sorrow. Yet even through that hardship our God blesses us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 296

"In Silent Pain the Eternal Son"

The Sermon – Text: John 4:5-26, 28-29, 39 *(See back page)*

"Happily Ever After"

The Offertory – *(Projected on Screens)*

The Acceptance into Membership of Mark and Beverly Freadhoff

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 496 *(Stanzas 1-4)*

"The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 186

"Savior, Again to Your Dear Name We Raise"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.

A note on Communion: It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (39) Average (38) Wednesday (23)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	- 7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	- 9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Dr. Daniel Sullivan is considering the call to fill the vacant position on the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran College. Pastor Jonathan Schnose has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Thomas Naumann is considering calls to both Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ and Grace of Fridley, MN. Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld has returned the call to Living Hope of Appleton, WI.

ILC Visitors Day – Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, WI will host their annual High School Visitors Day on Friday, May 1, 2026 for students grades 7 and up. An invitation letter, schedule of events, and online registration can be found at www.ilc.edu. Please register students and chaperones by Friday, April 24.

Lenten Season – A reminder that the fourth of our Midweek Lenten services is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7:00pm. All are encouraged to share in the blessings of these special midweek services.

Welcome! – This morning we welcome Mark and Beverly Freadhoff as our newest communicant members. Welcome, Mark and Bev!