Imagine that you are in the desert.
The hot sun is beating down on you.
You look around for a tree or bush, anything that might provide some shade.
There is nothing but sand and sun.
You’ve been walking for many hours and you feel hungry.
You stop and have some food to eat.
But you have nothing to drink and you are feeling very thirsty.
The sun seems to be getting hotter.
The sand is getting into your shoes, your clothes, and your mouth.
You think of a beautiful lake full of cool water, raindrops falling gently from the sky, running, as a child, through the sprinkler in your backyard.
You’re all alone.
You’re hot, so hot.
You’re tired and thirsty.
What would make you feel good right now?
Water!

The Samaratin woman, in the gospel story, arrives at the well, thirsty, but, her thirst is for something much deeper, than physical water.

The Bible often refers to water. The Bible refers to the lakes, rivers, sea, and wells, that were part of everyday life. Because ancient Israel was a dry land, water also takes on deeper meaning: it represents the source of life, maintenance of life, and transformation of life.

In Exodus 17:1–7 God maintains and sustains the lives of the wandering Israelites as Moses finds water in a rock. In Psalm 23 God is the good shepherd leading the writer toward green
pastures and still waters. The metaphor of water is used by Amos to call for justice from God’s people (5:24). John describes Jesus as one who provides life-giving water (4:10–14).

Jesus was on his way from Judea to Galilee when this story takes place (John 4:3). While the most direct route was through Samaria, most Jews of Jesus’ day would cross the Jordan River to avoid going through the land of the despised Samaritans; there was much resentment between the people. The text says that Jesus “had” to go through Samaria, indicating that there was a deeper significance to his chosen route than simply one of convenience.

Today’s gospel story is one of the stories where context is everything. Understanding the context helps us see the God of love invited people to forgive by letting go of past resentments.

First the context

"Tradition indicates that Jacob’s well, by which Jesus waits for his disciples’ return from buying food, was more than 100 feet deep and 7.5 feet in diameter. While it seems reasonable for Jesus to ask for assistance to draw water from this deep well, the Samaritan woman is surprised because she is a Samaritan and because she is a woman. When the Assyrians defeated the Samaritans and took them into captivity (722 BCE), many Jews remaining in Samaria married non-Jewish Assyrians, losing their ethnic and religious identity. Somewhat later, the Babylonians defeated Judea and took many of the people into captivity. They, however, maintained their identity. When they were finally allowed to return to Judea they rebuilt the temple. The Samaritans offered to help, and were turned down, so they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim.” (Seasons background) This started controversies, conflict, violence, and centuries of resentment between Jews and Samaritans.

Jesus walked into Samaria during a time when all good and self respecting Jewish people would taken the long route around Samaritan Territory. Also, it was considered NOT appropriate for a man to initiate a public conversation with a woman he didn’t know.

It was about noon when Jesus met the woman. Usually women drew water earlier or later in the day to avoid the heat. Carrying water is hard work, but a visit to the well gave women some
social contact. It is likely that the Samaratin woman came at this time to avoid other women who may have disapproved of her lifestyle.

She was a marginalized person and must have been very lonely. The woman at the well came to draw water at the hottest part of the day, instead of the usual morning or evening times, because she was shunned and rejected by the other women of the area for her immortality Jesus knew her history but still accepted her; fully without reservation. That day, at the well, Jesus offered her water, life-giving water---acceptance!

Have you ever been thirsty for that kind of acceptance; the absolute knowledge into the depths of your being that you are fully accepted for exactly who you are.

Jesus makes a statement that could be understood on two levels (4:10–14) when he tells the woman that God can give the gift of living water that will keep her from ever feeling thirsty again. At first she understands him only at one level and asks for living water so that she won’t have to come to the well again. As Jesus talks further with her, she begins to understand what he is offering her and becomes excited about the transformation that is possible. She puts aside her valuable water and runs to enthusiastically tell others of her discovery of the Messiah, the eternal one; God! Imagine being that woman, who had experienced, rejection, scorn, blame and resentment, and all of sudden there is acceptance. Years of hatred between Jewish and Samaratin peoples melt away in this interaction when Jesus says, "God is for all of you." This story is a manifestation of the God of love affirming a woman, affirming a people, and turning tribalism upside down. Jesus became a golden thread in the Samaratin Woman’s life that day! Her life went on to shimmer with hope. Though forgiveness is not mentioned in this passage it is a story about God's love and forgiveness offering healing at the well.

Two weeks ago, I preached the first in a sermon series on how to forgive, that in order to forgive we must believe in a God of love, that a god of fear will not help us, that having a forgiving brain is beneficial to our health, and that there are two reasons why people choose not to forgive either they do not know how or they do not understand what forgiveness is.

I love the story and the drama of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well; it is a love story. One that is often referred to as a divine wooing story, a story of God wooing God’s beloved.
This is a story of a God of love. There are many stories about wells in the bible, and often wells are the places where the bridegroom meets his bride. God, through Jesus, is wooing this marginalized woman, calling her back to the place of fullness of life.

That is exactly what forgiveness does; it calls us back to the place of fullness of life; it opens us into the eternal and life-giving qualities of God.

Forgiveness is like a golden thread in our lives. Remember, and you will hear me say this many times, because it is one of the misunderstandings about forgiveness, that forgiveness is not something we, human beings, try to do, rather it is something we join with. Forgiveness is a God quality; it is eternal meaning it has no beginning or end; it just is! Forgiveness manifests itself in our lives and brings into our lives other eternal, God like qualities. I like to call these eternal qualities the golden threads in our life. Once recognized they are noticed everywhere. Eternal qualities empower us to be difference makers; they give us the resiliency we need every day, and especially on those bad days, when personal earthquakes happen.

Some of those eternal qualities are acceptance, gratitude, creativity, connection, caring, healing, peace, forgiveness, friendship, and love. Life is like a tapestry, it is often the golden threads amidst darker threads in a tapestry or weaving that bring the tapestry to life.

Forgiveness is like a golden thread in a tapestry. It runs through your whole life. It is an eternal life-giving quality. In my first sermon on forgiveness I invited people into a Lenten practice of beginning the day with a forgiveness prayer, such as the one I used to at the beginning of this message, which is available at the back table or on the web site, and at the end of the day asking yourself the question, “who do I wish to forgive today? Then forgive that person.” I wonder if you have had any surprises as you have been focusing on forgiveness?

To my utter surprise, in my reflections this week, I realized that I wished to forgive my dad for dying. Forgiveness is not logical and as many of you know, my father died in October, he was 93, had a good long life, and had suffered for a number of years with congestive heart failure. I celebrate his life with deep gratitude and it seemed illogical that I needed to forgive him for dying. I miss his chuckle, his joy, his stories about his life and his connections up and down the
coast of BC. He was an anchor in my life; that is he gave me resiliency. Those things I value about him were and are the golden threads in his life. They are the eternal qualities, joy, connections, and resiliency, in his death those qualities are not taken away from me, and I want those qualities to show up in my future.

I have a forgiveness visualization process, which I will teach those of you who are able to attend the forgiveness forum. When I become aware of unforgiveness in my life I join with God and all the forgiveness in the universe.

Forgiveness is a golden thread which intricately weaves itself into our lives! It protects, or inoculates us from the root cause of misery; resentment. Resentment is holding onto the demand that the past would have been different. (I will unpack that statement more fully in week four of this series) We cannot change the past, the present moment is all that we have, and we have a choice about our future we can choose more resentment (misery) or more love (forgiveness). Forgiveness is something we with. Forgiveness has the capacity to seed out future with love and who doesn’t want more love in their future.

Amen