deciding to trust God and not be afraid. For the person who decides to trust in God alone, there is peace. There is also strength and song. When the LORD is our *strength*, it means that God is our resource and our refuge. We look to God for our needs and are satisfied. “Nor is [God] here called a part or an aid of our strength, but our complete strength*,”* wrote John Calvin*, “*for we are strong, so far as [God] supplies us with strength.” When the LORD is our *song*, it means that God is our joy, God is our happiness. We find our purpose in God.

Now we reach the key verse: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). This is a verse of profound poetic power, evoking feelings of happiness, comfort, and security. Hear it again: “With joy…you will draw water…from the wells…of salvation.” In ancient Israel, wells were not just important, they were critical for survival. Having access to clean, reliable water sources meant the difference between life and death. To access this life-giving water, you needed to do three things: dig a good well, dig a deep well, and use a good bucket.

**Dig a good well.** Today we drill wells using a cable tool or a rotary-drilling device. Drilled wells can go more than 1,000 feet deep. Before drilling technology, people dug wells by hand, wells “lined with stones, bricks, tile, or other material to prevent collapse, and…covered with a cap of wood, stone, or concrete tile.” The ancient Israelites dug their wells by hand, which meant the wells were not very deep. Hand-dug wells are susceptible to surface contamination; they may also run dry “during periods of drought if the water table drops below the well bottom.” Dug wells are vulnerable to enemy attack: if an enemy controls the water supply, they can lay siege to a city and readily claim victory.

Using a well as a metaphor for our spiritual life, we see that if our faith is shallow, it can easily be polluted by the world’s contaminations, or run dry when troubles arise, or collapse under the attack of outside ideas and pressures. God tells the prophet Jeremiah, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13). First, they forsook God, “the fountain of living water,” and second, they dug cracked cisterns, that is they led disobedient lives which did not hold water, thereby giving God a metaphor for their faithlessness. God’s people do not always dig good wells to withstand the pressures of life.

**Dig a deep well.** Jeremiah’s reference to “living water” draws us to John 4 and the account of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. She is astonished that Jesus approaches the well, ostensibly to satisfy his thirst, yet he has nothing with which to retrieve the water! Something is fishy; it does not add up, so she asks: “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” (John 4:11). She misunderstood Jesus’ meaning: she thought he had some magic water that would cure her physical thirst; Jesus spoke, instead, of quenching the soul’s thirst. Jesus encouraged the Samaritan Woman to dig deep and to tap into God who is the source of the Living Water. We can accept no substitutes.

Anglican bishop and scholar N.T. Wright tells a parable about a powerful dictator who, wishing to tame the many erratic streams and springs in his country, paved everything over with concrete so his government could deliver water the people through a complex system of pipes. The system worked for many years: until it didn’t. Wright says:

“Then, without warning, the springs that had gone on bubbling and sparkling beneath the solid concrete could no longer be contained. In a sudden explosion — a cross between a volcano and an earthquake — they burst through the concrete that people had come to take for granted. Muddy, dirty water shot into the air and rushed through the streets and into houses, shops, and factories. Roads were torn up; whole cities were in chaos….it wasn’t pure and couldn’t be controlled.

We in the Western world are the citizens of that country. The dictator is the philosophy that has shaped our world for the past two or more centuries, making most people materialists by default. And the water is what we today call “spirituality,” the hidden spring that bubbles up within human hearts and human societies.

Many people today hear the very word “spirituality” like travelers in a desert hearing news of an oasis. This isn’t surprising. The skepticism that we’ve been taught for the last two hundred years has paved our world with concrete, making people ashamed to admit that they have had profound and powerful “religious” experiences….We will pipe you (said the prevailing philosophy) the water you need; we will arrange for “religion” to become a small subdepartment of ordinary life; it will be quite safe — harmless, in fact — with church life carefully separated off from everything else in the world.…

From this point of view, spirituality is a private hobby, an up-market version of daydreaming for those who like that kind of thing.…Now at last it has happened: the hidden springs have erupted, the concrete foundation has burst open, and life can never be the same again.…“The hidden spring” of spirituality…functions as the echo of a voice; as a signpost pointing away from the bleak landscape of modern secularism and toward the possibility that we humans are made for more than this.”

Jesus is the “hidden spring” of spirituality, the true Living Water that feeds our souls. He is the signpost pointing away from the “bleak landscape of modern secularism,” and toward a way of life with the Living God in whom we find our spiritual health and wholeness, peace, and salvation. Jesus is the One who proves that we are “made for more than this.” When we dig deep and access the Living Water, Jesus makes it possible for us to rise above and go beyond, and to achieve our God-given purpose.

**Use a good bucket**. To reach this Living Water, we need to use a good bucket. It must be sturdy, without holes, and on a rope long enough to reach the water. Again, this is a metaphor for faith: when our trust is in God alone, we can reach deep into the water. When we let our bucket go with God, it will reach the Living Waters. Isaiah assures us, “You *will* draw water from the wells of salvation.” Jesus promised us “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). When we come to Jesus, we have access to the water from the well of salvation.

But God does not meet our needs as we sit in passive inactivity. We must reach out and draw what God provides, remembering that it is God’s *water*, God’s *well*, God’s *rope*, and God’s *bucket* that we use. Therefore, we may draw this water “with joy” because it is all “of the Lord.” We tend to downplay Jesus’ role in our lives because we are a mix of conflicting moods, values, passions, and ethical guideposts. We want to be service oriented, but selfishness prevents it. We try to regard others as better than ourselves, but the “me first” mantra echoes loudly in our heads. We want to look to the interests of others, but we are told there is a scarcity of resources, so we do not share. Such “bucket problems” get in the way of obedient discipleship. The Bible assures us that there is plenty of Living Water. “With joy you *will* draw water from the wells of salvation.” May we, like the thirsty cowboy who heeded Desert Pete’s note, be faithful and obedient, trusting God, casting our buckets into deep waters, and drawing up Christ’s Living Water for the salvation of the world.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for my wonderful salvation. Praise the Lord O my soul, for You are a great and mighty God. As I go into the world today as Your representative, give me increased boldness to speak the name of Jesus. May my life reflect Your grace and goodness, to Your praise and glory. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

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**Water from the Well**

Sunday, November 6, 2022 [Isaiah 12](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+12&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN John 4:4-15, 25-26

In 1963, the Kingston Trio released a song called “Desert Pete,” which tells of a thirsty cowboy who is crossing the desert and finds a hand pump. Next to it, Desert Pete left a note urging the reader not to drink from the jar hidden there but to use the water to prime the pump. The cowboy resists the temptation to drink and uses the water as instructed. As a reward for his obedience, he receives an abundance of cold, satisfying water. Had he not acted faithfully, he would have only a jar of unsatisfying, warm water to drink.

Sometimes life can seem like an arid desert; but God can quench our spiritual thirst in the most unlikely circumstances. When by faith we believe the promises of God’s Word, we can experience rivers of living water and grace for our daily needs. In chapter 11, Isaiah speaks powerfully of the reign of the Messiah as king over all the earth. This brief chapter of praise comes from the heart of someone who surrenders to the Messiah as king, who is faithful and obedient, and who enjoys the benefits of His reign.

In chapter 12, the worshipper praises God, even though he experienced God’s anger in the past. Under the Old Covenants, God exacted a vengeful wrath upon people who disobeyed. When God got angry, people could expect floods, fires, mass confusion, and military defeat. Under the New Covenant, God’s righteous anger is poured out on Jesus, the Son of God. There is no more anger from God towards us because God’s anger is “exhausted” at the cross. What we experience now is not anger, but God’s discipline; it may feel unpleasant, but it shows the parental love of God toward us. God’s anger is turned away because at the cross, Jesus took God’s anger so that we might be saved.

Thus, the worshipper can say: “Surely God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation” (Isaiah 12:2). To proclaim that “God is my salvation” is a powerful statement of faith. It says, “I am not my salvation. My good works, my good intentions, my good thoughts cannot save me. God alone will save me.” Too often we do not feel the need for God’s salvation. We think our lives are fine as they are, and we turn to God only when we are in trouble or need something. The worshipper in Isaiah 12 knows that God is his only source of salvation.

Armed with this knowledge, the worshipper “will trust and not be afraid.” The place of peace and trust, the place of “no fear,” comes only from our salvation in God. “I will trust and not be afraid” is a confident statement reflecting the will of the worshipper. He is