



LIVING WATER FOR A THIRSTY LAND: OUR CALL TO LOUISIANA MISSIONS

SCRIPTURE:

John 4:1–42

In John 4, Jesus makes a deliberate detour. Traveling back to Galilee, the text says he "had to go through Samaria" — not because it was the only route, but because someone was waiting there. A woman. An outcast. Someone far thirstier than she knew. What Jesus offers her beside that well — a spring of water that will never dry up (v. 14, CEV) — is the same thing his church offers today. Through ministries supported by the Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering, Louisiana Baptists are deliberately going through their own version of Samaria to offer that same living water.

GOING WHERE OTHERS WON'T (JOHN 4:1–9)

Jesus crossed every social line at once — speaking to a Samaritan, a woman, alone at a well. He didn't wait for the respectable crowd. He went to the margin. For more than twenty years, Louisiana Baptist women have done the same, walking through the gates of the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) in St. Gabriel. What began after Hurricane Katrina as an emergency delivery of hygiene items has grown into a statewide cooperative effort — over 150 churches filling gift boxes and delivering them behind prison walls each fall. Chaplain Debbie Sharkey calls the participating churches "hope dealers." Former inmate Demetricy Moore, who spent 25 years at LCIW, said the boxes carried a message she had nearly stopped believing: "There are people who care about me."

OFFERING WHAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW TO ASK FOR (JOHN 4:10–15)

The woman came for water. Jesus offered her something she hadn't dared to want. That's the nature of gospel ministry — people arrive thinking they need one thing and leave having received something far greater. Engrid Hamilton went to prison at 39. While incarcerated, God spoke clearly: "You've tried everything else but me. Try me." She did. When the gift boxes arrived, they were tangible proof that the God she was just beginning to trust was real. In Youngsville, families like the Fauchauxs — nominally religious, not particularly seeking — received a church mailer from Church Acadiana, visited, and found Jesus. The whole family has since come to faith. People rarely know to ask for living water. The church's job is to offer it anyway.

SEEING PEOPLE AS THEY ARE — AND AS THEY CAN BE (JOHN 4:16–26)

Jesus names everything the woman has been carrying — and keeps talking to her. That kind of seeing, refusing to reduce a person to their worst moment, is what makes genuine mission possible. Area Mission Strategist Dick DeBusk says it plainly: when you hand a box to a woman inside those walls, you realize you're handing it to someone's daughter, mother, grandmother. Chaplain Sharkey puts it this way: "Their past doesn't define them. They were regular people." Pastor Vinh Nguyen of New Hope Vietnamese Baptist Church in Baton Rouge carries this same vision in a different context — reaching a population most Louisiana churches never think about, going to Vietnamese markets, hosting dinners for LSU students, planting churches across the state. He says simply: Americans hear the gospel all the time. Vietnamese people often don't.

WHEN ONE PERSON TELLS, A WHOLE TOWN COMES (JOHN 4:27–42)

The woman leaves her water jar and goes to tell her town. She doesn't have everything figured out — but she has enough. And a whole community believes because she went. New Friendship Baptist Church in Pollock knows this logic. A fire destroyed their building in under an hour. That same afternoon, Pastor Lloyd Whitman called the congregation together and forty people decided: we rebuild. Dick DeBusk arrived with sixty volunteers and a tent. Louisiana Baptists extended their financial support. One Sunday morning a man came forward under that tent asking to be baptized — so they walked down to the creek. "We lost the building," Pastor Whitman said, "but we didn't lose the church."

WRAP UP:

Jesus told the woman, "If you only knew what God wants to give you" (v. 10). Everything Louisiana Baptists do in missions rests on that conviction — that the people around us, behind prison gates, in new subdivisions, and in the growing Asian communities of our state all need what only Jesus can give. And that we are the ones he is sending to offer it.

Jesus went through Samaria on purpose. Louisiana Baptists go through prison gates, into new communities, and to overlooked populations on purpose. The Georgia Barnette State Missions Offering makes that movement possible — not as an institution, but as the collected decision of thousands of Louisiana Baptists who said: we must go.

The well is still there. The water is still living. And there are still people sitting beside it who haven't yet heard someone offer them a drink.