Philip Yancey writes in *Christianity Today* of an encouraging truth he heard from a young man named Mike who works among the homeless:

Mike said that homeless people, having hit bottom, don't waste time building up an image or trying to conform. And they pray without pretense. As an example, Yancey shared this story of something that occurred when Mike and a friend were playing and singing a contemporary Christian song, As the Deer Panteth for the Water.” You may know this song a portion of which goes, as the deer panteth for the water So my soul longeth after thee You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship thee. This song, of course, is a prayer of worship of the singer to God.

In Mike’s words, as the two were singing, David, a homeless man we knew, started weeping. 'That's what I want, man' he said. 'I want that water. I'm an alcoholic and I want to be healed.'

 The Samaritan woman in the Gospel reading today needed and wanted that water, too. And when she realized that Jesus offered this water, she also came to Jesus without pretense, without regard for image. Jesus offers Living Water to all who thirst and all who bring themselves honestly and without pretense to him.

I invite us to think for a minute about the concept of living water. In the Middle East, water is a very precious because it is scarce and, particularly in southern Israel, water was stored in cisterns so that it could be used in times of drought. But water kept in cisterns does not yield the signs of life that flowing water does. Rain or natural springs (which come from God) are living, flowing water. When living, flowing water is plentiful, lush greenness is all around. When living, flowing water is scarce, the landscape become barren. Living water throughout the Bible has been associated with God; in the Garden of Eden where humans dwelt with God, a river welled up that formed the headwaters of four mighty rivers. Revelation tells us that the river of life flows from the throne of God. The prophet Joel also closely associates the living water of rain and springs with the outpouring of God’s Spirit.

So Jesus offers the Samaritan woman, a woman who in many ways would have been judged an outcast of society, a woman who was of a race despised by the Jews, this living water – this spirit of God, this presence of God in her life. Jesus says that everyone who has this water will never thirst again, that this water is a spring gushing up that brings salvation.

And the Samaritan woman accepts. She does so without trying to be someone she’s not; she does so without waiting until she can fix her own life. She just accepts and then, having accepted, has the courage to go to those in the town (including many who would have been responsible for her being an outcast) to tell them about this wonderful living water from Jesus. She takes this action spontaneously and honestly being true to herself and her conversion experience, without pretense, without worrying about how it looks, without worrying about whether her feelings will be hurt if she’s rebuffed by these people who rebuffed her before. This living water was to wonderfully refreshing, wonderfully healing, wonderfully life sustaining. This water brought new life to this woman. This water, which Jesus offers to us as well, regardless of our circumstances is refreshing, wonderfully healing, wonderfully life sustaining. It brings new life.

In his book *Sahara Unveiled,* William Langewiesche tells the story of an Algerian named Lag Lag and a companion whose truck broke down while crossing the desert:

They nearly died of thirst during the three weeks they waited before being rescued. As their bodies dehydrated, they became willing to drink anything in hopes of quenching their terrible thirst. Eventually, just to survive, Lag Lag and his companion were willing to drink water from the radiator, what was in effect poison.

Many of us do something similar in the spiritual realm. We depend on money, power, social status, sex, drugs, alcohol or any number of secular things to quench spiritual thirst. But these are poor substitutes for the living water Jesus brings. The world’s water keeps us thirsting for more and more, leading us further into addictions or workaholism or stresses that hurt our body. These substitutes are certainly no better than that smelly stale water that was kept in the cisterns for months at a time in Israel or the poisonous rusty radiator water that Lag Lag drank. Yes, addictions, stress that comes from seeking power and money, and workaholism can be poison.

Lag Lag, however, didn’t die. As he kept drinking the bad radiator water and he began to pray and make his peace with death. And with that peace came an inspiration. The truck’s tanks might still hold some diesel fuel and he might add engine oil for form a combustible mixture. So, he drained as much oil as he dared from the engine before pouring it into the tanks. He pressed the starter and, reluctantly, it came to life. He was able to drive a short distance where he was met by another truck that was rich with provisions of food and water. Lag Lag was rehydrated. Lag Lag was healed.

That wasn’t even the last time poor Lag Lag, a cargo truck driver, got stranded in the desert without water. It happened again another time, but Lag Lag prayed, received inspiration, and made his way to an oasis where he found a spring with living, flowing water.

The answer for us is the same as that for Lag Lag, whose prayers to Almighty God led him to life. It’s the same for the alcoholic man Dave, who responded to the song about the deer panting for water. It’s the same as for the Samaritan woman Yes to Jesus’s offer . Jesus offers us Living Water and all who thirst can receive this Living Water just by asking for it, without pretentions, without worrying about image. Jesus offers us Living Water when we come just as we are, our honest selves, bringing our true and full selves to worship Him.

Amen