

Come and see and live (John 4:5-42)

A spring of living water is not easily controlled.

by [Serena Rice](#)

March 6, 2026

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

“Come and see” is a bit of a thesis statement for John’s Gospel:

- We first hear it on the lips of Jesus when the disciples of John ask him where he is staying, and he invites them to come and see as an invitation to follow him (1:39).
- We hear it soon after when Philip repeats the invitation to Nathaniel after the latter expresses skepticism about Jesus (1:45).
- We will hear it later in the story when Jesus asks where the body of his friend Lazarus has been laid (11:34).
- And we hear it in this week’s reading: from the mouth of the foreign woman who has experienced something she did not expect and knows the only way to explain it to her neighbors is for them to see for themselves.

Throughout John’s Gospel the refrain of “come and see” is an invitation to push past one’s comfort zone, to step beyond what is safe and familiar, and to open oneself up for God to do a new thing.

This can be a challenging call to answer when the story itself feels safe and familiar. A boundary-transgressing conversation that was shocking to those who first heard the account does not have the same emotional hook if we already know the details and have heard countless sermons on their import. If we are to come and see and be changed as a result, we need to encounter something we haven’t seen before.

I wonder if that newness might be found in Jesus’ promise that the living water he brings “will become in [us] a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”? A gushing spring is an image of unconstrained abundance, of life so bountiful that we cannot possibly contain it all and it will spill out of us to those around us. But are we as ready as the Samaritan woman to ask for this gift?

After all, a spring of living water is not easily controlled. It cannot be compartmentalized in a way that leaves space for other priorities. It overflows. It saturates everything. A person with such a spring will never be thirsty again, but also they will never be dry. The life and faith embodied by a spring of living water will be messy and conspicuous.

The invitation Jesus extends with the offer of living water is not an invitation to a life of ease. It is an invitation to a life of total transformation—a life in which our connection to the wellspring of life in Christ permeates everything we do and say. It is a life that will serve those around us and will not let us shut them out.

What we have to decide is whether that is a life we want to come and see and then to live.