

The gospel for today is most of the fourth chapter of the gospel of John. If you remember last week's text, Jesus and his disciples had been in Judea for a while, but they were getting too much negative attention. So they decided to head north towards Galilee, and for some reason, Jesus thought they should go through Samaria to get there. Now this was certainly the shortest route, but it was also dangerous, since Jews and Samaritans had been openly hostile to each other for centuries. But that didn't stop Jesus and they ended up in the town of Sychar. Legend said that centuries before, Jacob had discovered an incredible spring, which became a well that was supposed to more than a hundred feet deep and over seven feet wide.

And that's where Jesus met the woman.

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It was about noon. The hottest time of the day. Jesus' disciples had gone into the city to buy food. And for some reason, Jesus was hanging out on the edge of town at the famous well of Jacob. A Samaritan woman, one of the locals, came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

The woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Normally a Jew would have refused to drink from the same cup as a Samaritan.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you've got no bucket, and the well is really deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water **that I will give them** will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "Well that's the truth. You've had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband."

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For centuries, people have read this story and assumed that the woman had a really shady past, but there's nothing in the Bible that says that the Samaritan woman was a prostitute or "a fallen woman." What's even more significant, is that Jesus never suggests that she needs to repent. Sin or the need for forgiveness are never a part of the conversation. And yet people have made all kinds of assumptions when we simply don't know the back story. She might have been a widow. Or abandoned. Or divorced. Or maybe all three. To have lost five husbands would have been tragic but not impossible. As for the person she was living with- there could be a lot of explanations, which I won't get into now, but suffice it to say- it's a much better story if we don't degrade her with stereotypes or negative labels.

After Jesus got her attention by describing her unusual marital circumstances, the woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

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In the gospel according to John, the word “see” is very important. Seeing is an important theological activity. When Jesus calls his disciples, he invites them to “come and see.” To see is often connected to faith, in John’s gospel. If you see – you believe. So when the woman says that she “sees” that Jesus is a prophet, she is making a statement of faith. She’s not trying to change the subject out of embarrassment. She knows that Jesus has seen her. He has seen the difficulties of her life and hasn’t made any assumptions. He has recognized her. Spoken with her and offered her something that no one else can. A new kind of life. A new kind of faith. He has seen her. She’s not invisible. She has worth and value. She has significance. She matters. And all of this is something that totally blows her mind! This was unexpected and really, unimaginable.

What makes it even more incredible is that this is the single longest conversation that Jesus has with anyone, anywhere in the Bible. And he has it with **a Samaritan. And a woman!**

She engages Jesus in serious theological conversation when she asks about THE proper place for worship. This is the argument that had divided their people for centuries. It is the key question that has resulted in hatred and violence and pain between their people.

The answer, is even more significant than the question because Jesus says that **place doesn’t matter**. Worship is about spirit and truth. It’s about what we share with God – not the place where we share it. You can pray anywhere. You can worship anywhere.

Then comes the real kicker. Jesus tells her that he is the Messiah. He is the promised one that both the Samaritans and the Jews been waiting to see. He will save them from their troubles. He is the one they’ve all been looking for and with that she is off! She drops her water jar and runs into the city. It’s a little detail but it says a lot about the woman and her faith in Jesus.

A water jar, was one of a woman’s most important possessions. It may have been a wedding gift. It could have been passed on from her mother or grandmother. And it was probably relatively fragile. But whatever the details might have been- she used that jar every day to bring water to her home. She needed that jar for all the things you do every day. But she was so excited about what Jesus had told her, she left it behind. She just couldn’t be bothered to bring it with her. What she was about to do was too important to be worrying about a jar!

“Come and see a man who told me everything I’ve ever done! Can he be the Messiah?” When she told people about her conversation with Jesus, they immediately left the city to find Jesus and see for themselves.

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Despite what we’ve been taught and told, this isn’t a morality tale. It’s a story about a woman who, although she may have had some tough breaks- she has this incredible interaction with Jesus. He sees her and she sees him! And she believes!

The contrast with last week’s story is really interesting. In John’s gospel, night time is a symbol of disbelief and dark deeds. And so Nicodemus comes in the dark and he can’t figure out a thing. He goes back into the shadows having come no further in his faith journey than when he arrived.

The woman, on the other hand, comes in the middle of the day. She is walking in the light, which for John is a symbol of faith. She has met the light of the world and having seen Jesus for who he truly is- she literally drops everything to share the incredible news of the one who sees us truly and deeply. The one who knows everything we’ve done and loves us just as we are. And then calls us to share this news with other people.

“Come and see!” She calls to her neighbors. “Come and see,” she calls to her friends. It’s the same words Andrew used when he told his brother Peter that he has found the Messiah. It’s the same phrase that Philip uses when inviting Nathaniel to meet Jesus.

It’s kind of sad that everyone remembers the names of those two disciples- Andrew and Phillip, but we don’t know her name. It’s really not fair. When they meet Jesus for the first time, they tell one other person, but she tells everyone she can find! What an example! That’s what evangelism is all about. Telling everyone you meet to come and see Jesus. That’s the work of an evangelist.

“Let me show you the way. Come and see Jesus. And be seen by him, really seen. And really loved”

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The chapter ends with some of the new believers telling the woman that, at first they believed in Jesus because of what she had told them. Their first encounter with their Savior was because of her. Incredible right? But what’s even better, is that having been shown the way, having been introduced to Jesus, their faith becomes deeper and richer.

They tell her, “It’s no longer because of what you said that we believe. Because now that we have heard Jesus for ourselves, we know that he is truly the Savior of the world.” And I’m pretty sure, that’s not the end of the story. It’s the end of the chapter, but there had to have been more to the story. The good news couldn’t be limited to just the people who were there that day. It couldn’t be contained in that city. They had seen Jesus. They had faith in Jesus. And they had shared the good news.

May we be equally inspired to tell other people about Jesus. To share our stories about God, so that other people might know how incredible it is to be in an active relationship with the Lord.

The story of the woman at the well is a great model for Evangelism. You don’t need any special training. You just have to be willing to tell the story. Anyone can do it. Share how you have come to know Jesus. Don’t worry what people think of you. Don’t get concerned about the details. Just tell them about what you have seen and heard. Invite them to come with you to see Jesus and keep at it, because your witness, your sharing the good news, can be life changing for them and for you.