



November 20, 2016
Carl Hofmann
If You Knew

Passage: John 4:1–15

1. See if you can list all the barriers Jesus crossed to reach out to the Samaritan woman at the well.
2. Go over Jesus's dialogue with the woman and try to outline his unique approach to her and how he raises spiritual themes in unexpected ways.
3. Make a list of "people on the margins" in the radius and orbit of your life (family, living environment, school, work associates, church, supermarket and shopping, sports, etc). How might you intentionally "cross over" to meet them, engage them in conversation, and show the love of Christ?
4. Thanksgiving is coming...how might these principles apply in any gatherings you'll be part of?

Note: Sermon manuscript can be found beginning on page 2 of this document.

Scripture passage for November 27

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—²although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"
⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

“IF YOU KNEW”
John 4:1-15 NIV
Carl Hofmann

Transcript of sermon:

Introduction

This morning, we continue in our sermon series through the Gospel of John. Last week we focused on John the Baptist and his ministry of preparation. We watched as he pointed to the true Messiah Jesus Christ. This week we pick up the story at the beginning of Chapter 4. Jesus moves northward and he has a surprising encounter. I'm reading from John, Chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. Let's listen in...

The Text:

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria.

Let's stop right there. I like the way Dale Bruner translates verse 4: “[Jesus] absolutely had to go through Samaria.” In other words, Jesus felt compelled by God. God was pressing him to go through this region! It was a “must do” for him. And that's surprising for at least two reasons. Let me show you on the map...

First, Jesus had two other routes he could've taken: he could've gone east along the Jordan River, or out west along the Mediterranean coast. Going through Samaria wasn't his only option. That's not why he “absolutely had to go” this way.

Secondly, although going through Samaria was the shortest way to Galilee, it meant you had to have contact with the Samaritans, a group the Jews hated. Still, Jesus “absolutely had to go through Samaria”—God was compelling him. Now, verse 5:

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

This is the real human Jesus! He's tired out. He's weak. He's spent. He's thirsty. He needs rest. Is your Jesus that real?! We believe Jesus is God; but he's also human. Very human. Let's continue...

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans).

Indeed they don't! Ever since the Assyrian invasion of Northern Israel in the 8th Century B.C., Jews in the south had looked on Samaria with suspicion and hostility. When the

Assyrians invaded the north, they forced the Northern Jews to intermingle with Gentiles. As a result, the Samaritans were mixed-race; over time, their Bible and their religion became different from the Jews in the South. Jews saw Samaritans as racially impure and religiously inferior.

Now, onto verse 10. Jesus is going to use special language and images that draw in the woman at the well...

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”
¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Notice the language Jesus uses: he chooses words like “gift of God,” “drink,” “water,” and “thirst” to spark the woman's interest, to draw her in. And it works! That's our text. Let's pray and reflect on it...

Our First Pres Pilgrimage of June 2015

A year ago, last June, I had the privilege of leading my fourth pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Nineteen of us from First Pres went there with HCEF, the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation. I love going to the Holy Land with HCEF. Their focus is not just to visit the ancient stones of the Bible sites, but also to meet the “living stones” (as the Apostle Peter calls them), the indigenous Palestinian Christians in the Land.

Did you know there have been Arab Christians in the Middle East since the Day of Pentecost? It's true! Check Acts 2 and you'll see. HCEF takes us into places most tours don't go. We go inside the Occupied Territories, into the West Bank. We worship with our fellow Christians there; we have fellowship together, share meals, pray and hear their stories. We meet with the highest Christian leaders in the Land, including the Latin Patriarch himself.

Last June all nineteen of us went deep into the West Bank, into a place I'd never been. I'll show you on a map... Most Western Christians never get this far into Palestine. Some might think it's unsafe; in fact, that's what the Israeli government would have you think about all of the West Bank. Take a look at this common sign on the border... While it may be dangerous to Israelis, it certainly wasn't dangerous to us. I think if you ask our First Pres folks who went, they'll tell you we never once felt at risk.

So off we went in the Northern West Bank, up to the city of Nablus. I guess you could say we “had to go through Samaria”! In Nablus, or biblical Sychar (or Shechem), we visited Jacob's well, the one we just read about. I'll show you some slides.

Here in the first one, you can see the entrance to the Greek Orthodox Church which has been built over the well.

In this second shot, you can see my very own woman at the well, Rupal!

And here in this third shot you can see a group of Palestinian refugee children who were out on a field trip from the Balata refugee camp nearby. They were delightful.

As we went through Samaria and met Palestinian Christians throughout the West Bank, we were blown away by their warmth and their hospitality. Their faith and hope also impressed us. They live under incredibly difficult circumstances and they can feel isolated and ignored. Visits like ours show them they're not alone, that we care about them and are concerned for them and want to support them.

Hopefully, in some small way, our outreach was not unlike what Jesus did: he crossed into risky territory to reach out and love people in need. Let's consider what he did and how he did it.

The Missional Ministry of Jesus

First of all, Jesus models for us a missional ministry. It's a ministry that intentionally reaches people outside our comfort zones. Missional ministry gets us out of the pew and into the world. It's very different from "attractional" ministry. Attractional ministry attempts to attract people to church and minister to them here. Jesus's ministry moves out in the opposite direction: it reaches out across borders and boundaries to touch people's lives.

I think this explains why Jesus "absolutely had to go through Samaria." Most Jews didn't go this route. They didn't want to go into enemy territory; they didn't want to be contaminated by the Samaritans. Jesus takes risks. Jesus goes. Jesus breaks through barriers!

Think of all the barriers Jesus broke through to reach the woman at the well: he broke through their historical animosity. He broke through racial hatred and religious intolerance. He broke through ceremonial purity laws; he broke through social and even sexual taboos. Men don't speak to unaccompanied women in that culture. That's shameful.

Jesus's outreach is risky and purposeful. He goes out of his way into an uncomfortable place. He risks his own religious purity and public reputation to reach out to this woman. He drinks from her cup and gets contaminated.

Jesus did this for her. We'll see next week he also did it for her fellow Samaritans.

But just as importantly, Jesus did all this to reach out to us. Recall what the risen Jesus said to his disciples in Acts 1:8. He told them that after the Holy Spirit came upon them,

they were to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jesus started his outreach to us by way of Samaria!

And notice how Jesus did this. He humbled himself and came to the woman in weakness and need. He was tired, spent, and exhausted. He was thirsty. This is the way he reaches out. He does it in weakness. Not in power and confidence. Not in vibrant, vigorous enthusiasm. But in weakness, the weakness of our common humanity.

Often we think we need to be at the top of our games, spiritually, in order to share Christ with others. We've got to have all the answers. Our lives have to be perfectly put together. We've got to burnish our armor to reach out. It's just not true! Jesus drops his guard, he's weak and vulnerable and in this surprising state, he sees room for a connection.

Next, Jesus begins his outreach to the woman not by preaching or confronting or debating. No. He begins with a simple question: "Will you give me a drink?" Then he listens and they have a conversation. Jesus uses plain words and images she can relate to. His words are simple...and profound. He doesn't bombard her with complicated themes or ideas; he doesn't overwhelm her with too much talk.

The British author E.M. Forster, in his novel, *A Passage to India*, challenges our tendency as Christians to talk too much. "Poor, little talkative Christianity," he writes of us. And he may be right: unlike Jesus, who speaks a little and listens much, we tend too often to overwhelm with our words.

Jesus uses common words: "drink, gift of God, living water, thirst"—simple ideas that can carry deep meaning. What about us? Do we speak in words our non-Christian listeners can understand? Do we use the "language of Zion" when simple English would do?

In his humility and simple speech, Jesus appeals to the woman's deeper thirst. "Whoever drinks the water I will give them will never thirst." Jesus speaks of satisfying the deepest part of our humanity—our hope to discover our ultimate purpose, our longing to find the fulfillment of our dreams, our search for security and significance, our desperate, unquenchable thirst for God. And then he offers "living water": God's presence, Christ's home, in the human heart. It's the Holy Spirit indwelling us and giving us assurance that we're loved and cherished by God.

Jesus's Missional Ministry Propels Us Outward

Jesus's missional ministry is why we're here today. First, because he's reached out to us just as he did with the woman at the well. He's gone out of his way to touch our lives, to meet us where we are and invite us to himself. We gather in his name, because Jesus has crossed boundaries to get to us and to change our lives.

If we're followers of Jesus, it's because on some level we've found out how thirsty we are. We're thirsty in a way that other things can't satisfy. Think of it:

In our education, we can work hard in our classes, get straight As, and realize it doesn't satisfy.

In our work life, we can be ambitious and climb the ladder, get to the top...and realize it was leaning against the wrong wall. We're still thirsty.

In our personal lives, we can try to find the perfect spouse, have the perfect house, and raise the perfect family and realize it never ultimately meets our need.

We can take exotic vacations or have a cabin in the mountains, and yet ultimately, it doesn't satisfy. We're still thirsty and only in Jesus can we find living water.

In Jesus, we've come to the well. We've begun to sip or drink or chug and we've tasted life. Now Jesus would have us share that life. He wants us to help him lead others to the well.

Sri Lankan pastor D.T. Niles once said that evangelism was one beggar telling another where to find bread. Today, we might say that evangelism is thirsty people showing other thirsty people where to find living water.

And to do this we need to cross barriers. We need to take risks. Jesus models for us a way to reach out. We can't just lob gospel tracts or post things on social media. We need to take risks and reach out personally in relationship, just as Jesus did.

We need what's being called in some circles "The Power of Proximity." Bryan Stevenson is a Harvard-trained lawyer who founded the Equal Justice Initiative. He works to bring fairness and equality to our criminal justice system. He spoke at a conference with the prolific Christian author and leader Tim Keller.

Hosted by the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, Stevenson tells the story of how, as a young law student, he reached out to a death-row inmate to bring him the news that he wasn't at risk of execution anytime that year. The inmate and Stevenson connected as they visited in the prison cell. It turns out they even had the same birthday. Their one-hour appointment turned into a three-hour conversation. Outside the cell, the guards grew impatient and angry. They roughed up the inmate. Let's let Stevenson tell the story in a video clip...

"The power of proximity." Jesus showed us this when he went out of his way to reach the woman at the well. It could only happen as Jesus got in close. If we want to see Jesus reach others through us, we've got to be willing to be proximate, willing to draw near to those outside our margins. Are you willing to do this?

We're already doing this in some wonderful ways at First Pres. I'm sure you're aware of many of them. There's the deacons closet clothing distribution on Thursday mornings. If you're willing to cross Walnut with our deacons, you'll find a whole different world there with people in need and stories to hear. It's transformative.

There are our short term missions. The University Ministries Messenger program sends our college students across cities and around the globe to share the love of Christ. We do this through short-term mission through our mission department. Our student and family ministry, by going out into the schools, does this all the time.

And we do this through KidsHope, our ministry to Columbine Elementary School. Years ago, Linda Overholser pioneered this mission to reach out to and adopt this school with unique challenges. Many of us have mentored students there. I met with my mentee, Joel, for 5 years until he graduated. Friends, KidsHope needs help. Our new director Harold Montoya invites us to join the team there. Take a look at this slide... I hope you'll give this some prayer. I sat here in a service years ago and I took the risk. Maybe you can too.

Jesus reaches out to us. He crosses borders to offer us life. He models a way we can take that life to others. We may have an opportunity to do that later this week...at the Thanksgiving table. For many of us, we come to Thanksgiving with this picture in mind [Norman Rockwell slide]. That's how we think it should be: harmonious, unified, and happy.

But in reality, many of our Thanksgiving tables are more like this one [Simpson Thanksgiving slide]. We've got the racist uncle, the alcoholic sister, the silent kid, the awkward or alienated relative. Here, right at this table, Jesus may challenge us to reach out with his love and life.

And it's all been made more complicated by the recent election, right? I know a number of you have mentioned to me that you're nervous about Thanksgiving. You're afraid it's going to be tense or ugly. Yet it's here we're called to be Jesus people. To be willing to go into this strange territory and point to him. I encourage you to plan your strategy. What will you say...or will you be silent? Both can be appropriate, depending on the situation. What can you learn? Where can you show compassion? How might you need to forgive or share or pray or simply ask good questions and listen?

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the outreach of God. In Jesus, God crosses boundaries and borders. In Jesus, God gets dirty and diseased with our infections. In Jesus, God seeks to touch us and embrace us. And once we've felt this touch, we're to reach out in his name and touch others. Who is on the margin of your life? Who is easy to overlook or avoid? Is it the barista at your café? The clerk at the supermarket? The student next to you in class? The fellow resident in your facility? How might you reach out—even to those across your dining table? Let me pray for you...