

## *The Amazing Woman of Samaria* John 4:3-42

Bill Chadwick    Oak Grove Presbyterian Church    February 4, 2018

*(Jesus) left Judea and started back to Galilee. <sup>4</sup> But he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.*

*<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."  
<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"  
<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> 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."*

*<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> ... <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am, the one who is speaking to you."*

*<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"  
<sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.*

<sup>31</sup> *Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”* <sup>32</sup> *But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”* <sup>33</sup> *So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”* <sup>34</sup> *Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me...”*

<sup>39</sup> *Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”* <sup>40</sup> *So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.* <sup>41</sup> *And many more believed because of his word.* <sup>42</sup> *They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”*

I included the Nicodemus story (John 3:1-9) for us to see the contrast between him and the Samaritan woman, which the gospel writer certainly intended for us to note. Nicodemus is a man, in a position of power and a Jew. In chapter 4 we have a woman, a peasant, and a Samaritan, “a triple outsider” (Barbara Brown Taylor). Nicodemus has heard about this Jesus and the amazing wonders he has performed. It is highly doubtful that this Samaritan woman has ever heard of Jesus. Nicodemus has a name, the woman remains unnamed. Nicodemus comes by night. Night in the Fourth Gospel represents separation from the presence of God (9:4; 11:10; 13:30) The Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at high noon. After a mere nine verses Nicodemus slips away, unenlightened. The woman engages in theological wrestling with this Jewish rabbi and ends up enlightened...and transformed.

Let’s walk our way through this theological feast of a passage. Jesus and his disciples are on their way from Judea to Galilee. To do so, they can either go around Samaria, which will be a six-day walk. Or they can go by the direct route straight north through Samaria. There is a 400-year history of enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. I won’t rehearse it here. Jesus chooses to go through Samaria.

At midday, the little band stops at Jacob’s well near the town of Sychar, in Samaria. The disciples go into town to buy food. Jesus rests near the well. A lone woman approaches the well to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. The well is 100 feet deep. Jesus has no bucket.

The woman is shocked by the request, “How is it that you who are a Jew ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” Jews and Samaritans were enemies, and Jewish men were not allowed to speak to a woman in public, even their own wives. Jesus is busting through barriers left and right.

Jesus doesn't build walls; he tears them down.

And then they began a dialogue. (No doubt we are just getting the Cliff's Notes version of what must have been a much longer conversation.)

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." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

So, like Nicodemus with the phrase "born again," the woman takes Jesus literally about the living water and she misses the point.

She says, "Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> 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." "All Jewish pictorial religious language was full of this idea of the thirst of the soul which could be quenched only with the living water which was the gift of God." (*The Gospel of John, Daily Study Bible Series*, William Barclay, p.154) We see it in Isaiah, in the Psalms and ultimately in Revelation.

<sup>15</sup> 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."

Then Jesus switches the topic so abruptly we almost get whiplash. <sup>16</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."* <sup>17</sup> *The woman answered him, "I have no husband."* *Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';* <sup>18</sup> *for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"* <sup>19</sup>

For hundreds of years commentators have concluded that this woman who has had five husbands and is now living with a man not her husband, must obviously be an immoral woman and that this entire passage is about how even one such as she can be forgiven of her sin. But recent scholarship casts doubt on this interpretation. In the first place, the word "sin" is never mentioned in this passage. In fact, in John's gospel, sin is not primarily about moral behavior, but lack of belief. In the second place, in the Middle Eastern world of Jesus' day, there were any number of reasons a woman might have had five husbands. People didn't live very long. She could have been in a levirate marriage. The custom was that if a husband died before the

couple has had a child, then his next oldest brother must marry the woman, to give the first husband children. If the next oldest brother died, then the next must marry her, and so on. And there are other explanations, almost all of which would place the blame for this woman's history, not on her own volition, but on the men who had power over her. At any rate, Jesus does not judge her. There's no reason for us to do so.

When he tells her these things about her personal history she is dumbfounded. How could he possibly know any of this about her? No Facebook or LinkedIn to learn about her. So why does he perform this little parlor trick of telling this woman about her history when there is no logical reason for him to know it?

She immediately recognizes that Jesus is a prophet. It's just like when Jesus first encountered Nathanael and said, "Before Philip came to you, I saw you sitting under the fig tree." "From miles away?" thought Nathanael. So Nathanael answered, "Surely you are a prophet!"

So, too, in this case Jesus wants this woman to understand his identity. When he speaks of her past knowingly and compassionately, she realizes she is in the presence of a prophet.

She responds by asking a question about a Jewish-Samaritan controversy, which a prophet, and only a prophet, should be able to answer.

*Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain (nearby Mt. Gerizim), but you (Jews) say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."*

She's not trying to change the subject off of her marital history. She is taking this opportunity of being in the presence of a true prophet to get the answer to an important theological question.

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth."* That's a huge deal, what Jesus just said, a huge deal for the hearers of John's gospel: the time for Temple worship, either at Gerizim or Jerusalem, is over. God will be known through Jesus, not through Temple sacrifice.

*The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”* <sup>26</sup> *Jesus said to her, “I am, the one who is speaking to you.”*

“I am.” Where have we heard that before? When Moses encounters God at the burning bush and is commanded to go back to Egypt and lead his people out of slavery, Moses says to the voice, “I need some credentials. I have to tell them your name. By what name are you known?” And the voice answers, “Tell them “I am.” That’s the name of God, Yahweh, “I am.”

And here in chapter 4 is the first time Jesus claims that title, “I am.” Later in this Fourth Gospel: “I am the light,” “I am the door,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the way, the truth and the life...” The famous “I am” sayings of the gospel of John in which Jesus is claiming his identification with God. His identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, is first revealed to this unnamed woman of Samaria! That’s so cool. Like the first witnesses of the resurrection were all women! We have a surprising God!

<sup>27</sup> *Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”* <sup>28</sup> *Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,* <sup>29</sup> *“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”* <sup>30</sup> *They left the city and were on their way to him.*

She left her water jar...There are no unnecessary details in the Fourth Gospel. Everything means something. She left her water jar....She left her baggage behind. She hurries back to the village and exclaims, “Come and see (usually Jesus’ line) a man who told me everything I have ever done...and accepts me anyway.” Those last four words are not spoken aloud, but they certainly are implicit in the joy in which she runs back to the village to tell people that she has perhaps met the Messiah.

Isn’t that a wonderful, wonderful truth for all of us? “Come and see a man who (knows) everything I have ever done...and accepts me anyway.” That’s the good news of the gospel, my friends.

Jesus, at this point in his ministry, has disciples, but he does not yet have “apostles.” We often use the words interchangeably, but they are actually distinct. “Disciples” are students who sit at the master’s feet to learn. An “apostle” is one who is sent. See the difference? Sit and learn; go and tell. Later the 11 disciples all become apostles, but not yet. This unnamed Samaritan woman is Jesus’ second apostle, after Andrew, who brought his brother Simon to Jesus: “Come and see,” she cried. “I just met a guy who might be the Messiah.”

Meanwhile, the disciples have returned and urge Jesus to eat. How many of you like food? A lot?

Jesus disciples urged him to have some lunch. He responded, “My food is to do the will of the One who sent me.”

A verse worth underlining...and memorizing. Please repeat after me: “John 4:34. ‘My food is to do the will of God...’”

My food...what truly satisfies me...is to do the will of God. When we think of food—many times a day for most of us—may we remember to ask ourselves, “What is God’s will for me right now?”

They know where the true food is found.

*Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word.<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”*

The only time in John’s gospel we find that word “savior,” here from the mouths of enemy people, who call him “the Savior of the world.”

Three questions for us to help this written word become living word in our lives: Will we be builders of war or of bridges?

Second. What clay jars do we need to leave behind in order to do the will of God?

Finally, will we be only disciples, or will we be apostles? Will we share the good news of Jesus?

Amen