

Scripture: John 4:5-42 (NRSVUE)

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9** 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.) **10** 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." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" **12** Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** 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." **15** 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."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." **17** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" **19** The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." **21** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." **25** 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." **26** Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

27 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?" **28** Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, **29** "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" **30** They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." **32** But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." **33** So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" **34** Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. **35** Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. **36** The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. **37** For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' **38** I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." **40** So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. **41** And many more believed because of his word. **42** 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."

Sermon

Wow, what a long reading. The scripture may be longer than the sermon this week. Jesus chose to go through Samaria. There were other routes. I think that his choice holds great significance. The city of Sychar is steeped in Israel history. For starters, this region is associated with God's promise to Abram. It's connected to Jacob's land and then this is the land that Joseph was buried in.

By the time Jesus comes through the city and rests at the well, there is much animosity among the Samaritans and the Jews and this animosity is not hidden, it is an open book. From a historic standpoint, the hostility reached a climax around 128 BC when John Hyrcanus, who was the high priest and ruler of the Jews, came in and destroyed the city and razed the temple. There is no wonder that there is still bitterness in the air.

The text of the time would be extremely shocking to the initial hearers. Jesus interacting with a Samaritan Woman would have rocked the world of many. They could not have imagined this occurrence. Then, this is not a small conversation and story, it is one of the longest in the New Testament.

I know that many times when we hear this story, we focus on the woman's history. I was tempted to address her story or give some insight on the possibility that the marriages mentioned in the text are symbolic. However, I have decided to go in a different direction. I have given some insight on the symbolism in a video if you are interested.

What I want to focus on is the words of truth that Jesus gave to the Samaritan woman and then what she did with that truth. The truth comes in verses twenty-five and twenty-six. Listen in to these words:

The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story." "I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."

What did the women do?

She was shocked to the core and left in a haste. She even left her water jug back at the well. She went back to her village to tell everyone that she could about what had happened and said "Come and See." Those in the village heard her words and followed her back to the well.

You may recognize those three words: Come and See. We have heard them before in the recruitment of the early disciples. An unnamed Samaritan Woman becomes the most effective evangelist of John's Gospel. Absolutely amazing. Her testimony changed the lives of her neighbors. They came to know the Gospel because of her action – her words – her testimony.

Now, I hope that you noticed that she did not leave in haste from the get go. There was some intense dialogue that occurred before she left. The intense dialogue even included her challenging Jesus, something that I think we often overlook. Let's take a deeper look at how the conversation played out and then what I want us to take home.

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When Jesus invites her into a conversation, she immediately recognizes the society dynamics that are put into play; especially the barriers and boundaries that are put in place as she is a Samaritan and a woman and is being approached by a Jew and a male. Yet, she does not hold back. The words of Jesus have challenged her thoughts and beliefs. So, she pushes back. She challenges his authority over and against the ancestors of the faith. After Jesus responds to her push back, she still has uncertainty. Yet, she goes. We know that she is holding onto uncertainty because of the language that she uses when she witnesses. Her witness includes a question: “*Do you think this could be the Messiah?*”

I love that she is witnessing about Jesus even though she does not have all the answers.

Here is what I want us to wrestle with and come away with about this interaction. The Samaritan woman demonstrates what can happen when we actually engage in conversations and questions about faith.

There are various definitions about faith but let me share Karoline Lewis definition with you and her definition is connected deeply to the Samaritan woman. She says that faith is about dialogue, growth and change. Those are three powerful words: dialogue, growth and change.

Do we have the courage of the Samaritan woman? You do not have to have all the answers to **invite** others to come and see.

Do we have an open-mind like that of the Samaritan woman? If we hold so tightly to our doctrinal constructs, we might miss a revelation.

The Samaritan woman was changed. When we are willing to encounter Jesus, we can be changed as well.

I am so glad that the Samaritan woman is included. Her inclusion is a radical inclusion. I mean, really, who would have thought that a Samaritan woman would be an apostle. To place her in the same company as Peter, Phillip, and Nathaniel is to watch a long-standing-barrier of race and gender fall and the reconciling message of Christ rise.

The message of Jesus is truly for all. There are no more barriers and because of that, we can and should be inviting all. No limitations.

May we be people who love, invite, and welcome all to our spaces.

AMEN.