

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 4:1-15
Living Water

When scientists study the planets of our solar system, they are often focused on finding water. Why? Because, where there is water there is life. I can remember my numerous hikes through the hills and woods of Western Pennsylvania as a young teenager. And one of the highlights of the day was a stop at a mountain spring where I would drink my fill of water. There was nothing like that pure crystal clear, cold water! Well Jesus has been traveling for about six hours and around noon he stops at a spring fed well in a Samaritan town called Sychar. Now a well whose source was fresh spring water was highly coveted as opposed to the stagnant water of a cistern. Such water was referred to as “living water.”

Interestingly, Jesus was about to engage in a conversation with a Samaritan woman and he would have two major topics on his mind, “living water” and “true worship.” Now we have all heard the expression, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” Well in this passage we see our Lord masterfully leading a Samaritan woman to life-giving water. And by the end of the day she would take a drink. **These verses beautifully illustrate how to lead a lost soul to the living water that Christ is offering. Indeed we will learn a number of things that characterize Jesus’s evangelistic thrust:**

I. He was always planning for the perfect moment to witness.

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. (4:1-4)

1. You must not allow others to determine the agenda in your life and ministry.

Jesus was having a highly successful ministry in Judea - even greater than that John the Baptist. By now the Pharisees have heard of his success and the rapid growth of his messianic movement. They could easily interpret his mission as having political overtones. Just as they had investigated John’s credentials, now they were most certainly investigating his. But, Jesus did not want to be involved in any outward conflict Rome. It was not the time to reveal himself as the Messiah.

2. God must set your agenda.

Jesus’s trip into Samaria was out of divine necessity. Jesus, as we should, listened to and obeyed the promptings of the Holy Spirit in his life. It was God who was leading him to that well in Samaria at the perfect moment in time so that he might witness to the Samaritan woman. And God can and will do the same for you.

II. He dared to go where no one else would go.

⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. (4:5) ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) (4:5-9)

If you are to be effective in sharing the life-giving water that Christ has to offer, you must be willing to go places and engage with people that scare you, are offensive to you, or are offensive to others. Indeed, it is often these very people that are most open to the gospel.

*****Once, while speaking on the topic of grace in Toronto, I asked the audience about their own experiences conveying grace to others. One woman shocked us all: "I feel called to minister to telephone marketers. You know, the kind who call at inconvenient hours and deliver their spiel before you can say a word." All day long these sales callers hear people curse at them and slam the phone down. I listen attentively to their pitch, then I try to respond kindly, though I almost never buy what they're selling. Instead, I ask about their personal life and whether they have any concerns I can pray for. Often they ask me to pray with them over the phone, and sometimes they are in tears. They're people, after all, probably underpaid, and they're surprised when someone treats them with common courtesy.**

1. You may be called to minister to a group of people (or a person) with which you do not feel comfortable.

1) You may not feel comfortable with their ethnicity. The Jews hated the Samaritans. And although the usual trek taken by travelers from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria, devout or strict Jews would bypass Samaria taking a much longer indirect route. The Jews had no dealings with Samaritans and that is why the Samaritan woman is so surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink. Jesus would have to bridge the barrier of her ethnicity. The Samaritans were considered to be half-breeds. When the Assyrians had conquered the ten tribes of Israel, they had repopulated the area with foreigners. And so the Samaritans were mixed breed who were not truly Israelites. One rabbi said that "to eat the bread of the Samaitans is like to one who eats the bread of swine." You may have the same uncomfortable feeling or even a strong dislike for those who are not of your race or social strata.

2) You may not feel comfortable with their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs. The Samaritans had built their own Temple on Mount Gerizim. The newcomers from Assyria had brought with them their foreign gods and so the Samaritans soon developed a syncretistic religious system of idolatry

and the worship of Yahweh that was eventually incorporated into their daily life. Further, they only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as Scripture. Jesus would have to bridge the barrier of her religious beliefs. Indeed, it was well known that the Pharisees actually prayed that no Samaritans would be raised in the resurrection and receive eternal life. We have seen the same thing in America where faith and religion has become pluralistic. Our culture has become a mixture of secularism and a melting pot of different religious beliefs. We are no longer truly a Christian nation. This has caused many Christians to develop a fortress mentality - to exclude themselves from or retreat from sharing their faith in an increasingly hostile climate. Others, like the Samaritans, have tried to mix the secular practices of society with the views and practices of their faith.

3) You may not feel comfortable with their morality. Jesus is also crossing over the barrier of interacting with a woman who is considered morally an "untouchable" in that society. She is the lowest of the low. A "proper gentleman" would have shunned her. The very fact that she comes to the well alone and at noon demonstrates that there is something up with her. And as we will see, she has had intimate relations with five men and is not married to her current partner. Jews believed that to receive a drink from her would mean ritual defilement and would make Christ unclean. The problem with this is that the Pharisees, and many Jews, were arrogant and self-righteous and were morally no better than she was. Christians today struggle with the same problem and often ostracized themselves from any contact with the "low types."

4) You may be uncomfortable with their gender. There would have been a number of difficulties with Jesus speaking to her. First of all, rabbis and teachers would generally be unwilling to discuss theological issues with women whom they believed to be uneducated and unintelligent. Second, this speaking with her would have invited the accusation of acting in a flirtatious manner. The fact that Isaac's and Jacob's wives were met at wells, created the sort of precedent that would make a devout Jew cautious. Jews believed that unless one was looking for a mate, they should avoid speaking to women in public and especially at wells which were known to be places where men could "pick up" women. Jesus is clearly breaking all the rules. We too, and sometimes for good reason, are often cautious speaking to someone of a different gender. And it is also a problem that some men and some women have a great disdain toward the opposite sex.

2. You may be called to another nation to which you do not wish to go. In our time, it may be an Islamic nation which would understandably instill fear for your safety. You may have many other reasons like economic hardship, bigotry, hatred, etc. But if God is calling you to go and you have taken the time to know that it is truly his calling, then you must go. It is the only place where you will be

truly happy, truly successful, and it is the place where God can powerfully use your unique talents and abilities to grow his kingdom.

*****According to new research from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity one out of five non-Christians in North America does not "personally know" a single follower of Christ. That's 13,447,000 people who don't have a Christian friend or even acquaintance. The percentages get higher for certain religious groups. For instance, 65 percent of Buddhists, 75 percent of Chinese people, 78 percent of Hindus, and 43 percent of Muslims in America do not personally know a follower of Christ.**

Worldwide, the numbers are much worse: more than 8 in 10 non-Christians do not personally know a follower of Christ. Todd M. Johnson, one of the researchers for the study, said that relatively small gestures—like inviting families into your home for Thanksgiving dinner—can have a bigger impact than huge mission campaigns. Johnson said, "You should really have lifelong friendships with Hindus, Buddhists, and so on. It's so simple, and yet it becomes a great deal."

III. Jesus used a physical need to introduce the all important spiritual need.

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 nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

As he speaks of "living water" we notice that:

1. You must stay on message.

Jesus ignores the woman's implied insult (4:9; "Why are you, a Jew, giving a Samaritan, water? Isn't that beneath you?") and takes charge of the conversation transposing the discourse from a literal physical plane to a metaphorical spiritual one. The Jewish/Samaritan distinctions are irrelevant in the kingdom to come. Jesus does not allow himself to become distracted by peripheral issues and consequently obscure the message of life giving water. It is important to give an answer for the hope that is in us, but when sharing our faith, we must not get sidetracked in a long argument about less important questions or questions for which we do not have answers (catholic vs. protestant; adult vs. infant baptism, etc.).

2. You must offer a greater gift than the one they are seeking.

She has come for the “gift” of highly coveted fresh spring water from a spring fed well. This was no ordinary well. But Jesus is offering her something far better than quenching her physical thirst. He is offering her the spring of living water from the well of salvation.

1) Jesus begins where the woman was with something material and practical that they both had in common: the desire and need for water. Physical thirst is among the most intense and imperative human cravings. We must have water. Where there is no water there is no physical life.

2) Jesus then captures her attention and curiosity by implying that he was more than what he appeared to be, and that the living water he was offering was more than what it appeared to be. She must’ve wondered “Who is this; what is this gift of God; and what is this living water he is talking about?”

3) Jesus offers the ultimate “thirst quencher.” If she drank what he had to give her, she would never thirst again.

*** Much of what we seek in this life we will have to a much greater degree in the new heavens and earth (intimate relationships; riches; satisfaction; peace; etc.)

3. You must point them to the source of the life giving water.

The woman’s question reveals incredulity concerning Christ’s person and the water that he is offering. What he is saying is unbelievable to her. He is coming off as a cheap charlatan. How could Jesus draw water out of such a deep well without a bucket?

1) Christ is saying that he is greater than Jacob. He is greater in that he originally created the physical living water that she is drinking, and he is the source of all spiritual life-giving water.

2) Christ is saying that this life-giving water is an amazing gift that will provide the spiritual refreshment and satisfaction that comes from a complete cleansing and deliverance from sin. It is the “water” of eternal life.

3) Christ has been sent by God to satisfy the thirst of God’s people. Many Old Testament passages promised a life giving satisfying water that would bring the promised salvation of God’s people (Isaiah 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; 55:1-7; Ezekiel 36:25-27). It would become a fountain, not just a cup, providing a perpetual inner source of spiritual refreshment. It would provide eternal relief for their spiritual thirst.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of this section, the woman is still focusing on physical things. She does not yet understand. Jesus has raised a vital spiritual issue, but the woman’s conscience has not yet responded. She is apparently thinking that living water would be convenient. At least she would not have to lug her water pot to this well every day. But just be patient, things will change. In this passage, we

have seen a weary Christ, a thirsty woman, and now a springing fountain. Christ promised her and he promises you to place a spring within the life of anyone who will come to him. And this is no ordinary spring, but a spring that will never cease to continue to bubble away forever. You can't keep a spring underground. You will never be able to bulldoze anything over it. You may even try to stifle God's presence by piling some foreign substance over the spring. And when you do the dirt of your sin might muddy the water. But God's love and holiness will cause him to relentlessly pursue you. He will even make a mess of your life, if he has to, until you come to the point where you will let him perfect that work in you that he began when you first trusted in Christ. Will you yield to him every area of your life? If you do, he will satisfy any righteous longing that you have ever had. His living water is ever present to wash away the mud of your every sin and to bring the satisfaction and joy of a Christ-filled life.

***** C. S. Lewis in his book , *The Silver Chair*...**