

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 the sixth hour.

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.)

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 flocks and herds?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I 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 won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He 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. ¹⁸ The 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. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

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

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

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." (John 4:5-26)

Jesus Insists of Reaching Us

Who is the right person to reach with a message? Advertisers think about that question. It costs money to produce all those fliers that you get in the newspaper or that you find stuck to your front door. Every one that gets thrown away is money wasted. So smart advertisers try to figure out who would be most interested in what they're selling and then they make sure those people get a flier. They will do everything they can to reach that target. This morning, we see that God will stop at nothing to reach his target. You and I are here today, because God reached us. Now, maybe in your personal history it doesn't seem like God moved heaven and earth to do that. Maybe all he did was have your parents bring you to be baptized when you were a baby or to catechism class when you were in 7th grade. Maybe the whole thing seems kind of hum drum. But behind those ordinary things, God hides himself. **Jesus insists on reaching us!**

I.

He shows that in the gospel lesson that we have before us. Jesus was traveling through Samaria. The Samaritans were a mixed people. Seven hundred years before this, part of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. Most of the Jewish people were deported to other parts of the Assyrian Empire and new people were brought in. But some Jewish people remained and some were allowed to come back. All those peoples blended together to become the Samaritans. The Jews looked down on them, both because of their mixed heritage and because they changed their copies of the Bible to make it look like they were the chosen people, not the Jews.

Samaria was between Galilee, where Jesus did much of his preaching, and Jerusalem. Instead of going around, Jesus decided to take his disciples through this foreign area. When we reached a little village called Sychar, Jesus sat down to rest. He sent his disciples into the village to buy food. He waited for a Samaritan woman – a woman whose name we never hear – to come out and draw water, because he planned to bring her into the kingdom of God.

When he first spoke to her, she was shocked. Observant Jews didn't associate with Samaritans. This woman probably expected Jesus to pretend like she wasn't even there. But instead, he asked her to give him a drink. Of course, Jesus wasn't really interested in water. He wanted to share the gospel with her. But to do that, he had to engage her. That simple act of asking for a drink to get the conversation started tells us enormous things about God and his plan for the whole world. God loved this foreigner. Many Jews of Jesus' day would've rebelled at the idea that God could love a Samaritan. But God didn't just love a Samaritan, he loved a woman who had sinned again and again. Jesus observed that she had had five husbands and she was then living with a man who wasn't her husband. She had abused God's institution of marriage and was living in sin even as they spoke. But God arranged everything so that she and Jesus could have a private conversation, without even his disciples to interfere, so that Jesus could lead her to faith.

My friends, don't fail to see yourselves in this Samaritan woman. The Samaritans do still exist today. There are about 700 of them living in Israel. But I doubt that any of us here today are related to them. We are nearly all Gentiles. Yet, the God of Abraham arranged everything in our lives so that we came to faith. Don't think for a moment that we deserved that. It might be easy for us to look down on that woman and her marital disasters. But do we have good reason? Even if we leave aside the question of how many of us have been divorced for scriptural reasons or otherwise, even if we assume that most of us have never cheated on our spouses, we still need to be very careful here that we don't set ourselves up on a pedestal that God needs to knock us down from.

Jesus tells us that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Can any adult claim that they have never committed adultery in their heart? God calls all of us to honor marriage as his institution, even if we've never been married. Living together undermines that. But so do dirty jokes. So does running down the opposite sex – and let me tell you, we Christians in America today seem to have forgotten that it's a sin for women to say that all men are stupid, and especially that their husbands are stupid or difficult. And we Christian men seem to have forgotten that it's a sin to portray all women as difficult or psycho or demanding. That's especially true when we're talking about our own wives. How many of us truly honor marriage and our own spouses the way God calls us to?

Aren't we guilty of that sin and of many others? Today, Jesus is showing us the miracle of his love. In spite of our sin, in spite of the fact that God should condemn each and every one of us to hell, Jesus came for us. And he found us. To do that, he first had to live as our Savior. He had to keep the sixth commandment and every other commandment perfectly. He did that, even though he never married. He kept his heart and his mind and his body pure. He honored God's institution as we don't – as we can't. Then he carried all our failure to honor marriage to the cross. He died because we lust. He died because we put down the opposite sex. He died because we sometimes feel trapped in our marriages and we fail to love and honor the spouses God gave us. He died because sometimes even Christians break their wedding vows. Jesus died and he paid for all that sin – for you and for me and for all the world. Then he rose and said that we're all forgiven.

Then he found us. He worked through Christian parents who weren't perfect by any stretch of the imagination. But they brought us to be baptized. They brought us to hear the gospel. God worked through pastors and teachers who sometimes frustrated us but who taught us. God worked through congregations that struggled and sometimes made bad decisions and often did a terrible job of managing their finances. But he used those churches and those ministries to baptize us, to teach us, to commune us. He taught us the gospel even though we are sinners and he owed us nothing. **Jesus insists on reaching us, no matter who we are.**

II.

And the really amazing thing is how hard we often make it for him to do that. You see that in Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman. When Jesus asked for the drink, the woman responded, **“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”** She was almost snotty – although given the hostility between Jews and Samaritans, it wasn't not surprising. Think how much mileage the devil gets out the differences between people. Think how hard it is for neighbors or coworkers to talk about their faith with

people they don't like! There might well be people at work that you don't want to run into at church! And there might be people that you wouldn't listen to if they tried to talk to you about faith.

But Jesus did not stop. He told her that if she understood who she was talking to, she would ask him for a drink and he would give her living water. But she didn't ask the question Jesus was driving at: "Who are you?" Instead, she wondered how he was going to get the water out of the well without a bucket. So Jesus tried again. He said, **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** He clearly did not mean the physical water in the well. He was talking about the gospel and the effect it would have on her heart.

Now, she wanted that water – but only so she wouldn't have to keep coming to the well. Water is heavy. Pulling it up from the well and carrying it back to her house was hard work. But Jesus wasn't really being that difficult. He was telling her to stop thinking about the physical water and think deeper. She seems almost stubborn in refusing to take the bait. She didn't ask what he meant. She focused on this life.

But Jesus wanted her to believe so he adopted a different tactic. He told her, **"Go, call your husband and come back."** Jesus was not going to approve of her living arrangement, so she said, **"I have no husband."** That's when Jesus came down like a ton of bricks: he knew she had had five husbands and she was living with a man who wasn't her husband. Then he said **"What you have just said is quite true."** Jesus hit her that hard because he wanted her to repent. Until she confessed her sin, she was not ready to hear the gospel.

But did you see how she tried to wiggle out of the law? She changed the subject. **"Sir, the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet.'"** She stuck a little compliment and then she asked about the religious controversies between the Jews and the Samaritans. The most obvious part of that controversy was where the temple was supposed to be. Jesus did spend a minute on her question. He told her that salvation is from the Jews. The Savior was born from the Jews and the law God gave them on Mt. Sinai and all their history prepared the world for him. But the time had come when the Mt. Sinai rules were ending. We are no longer bound to that temple in Jerusalem. God's people are not limited to one ethnic group. Jesus spoke to her worshipping God in spirit and in truth. He was subtly asking her if she worshipped God in spirit and in truth.

She knew she didn't. Here at last, I think she was caught. She admitted that she needed the Messiah to come and explain things. Jesus said, **"I who speak to you am he."** At last, Jesus proclaimed the gospel. Now, that's the end of the text for today, but not the end of the story. This woman was convinced. She went and she called all the people she knew. Jesus stayed and taught for two days in that village and many believed.

All by itself, this would be a wonderful incident from church history for which we should praise God. But this isn't just an incident from church history. It's a lesson in how God deals with us. Sinners don't want to hear what God has to say. That's even true of us believers. We often don't want to think too hard about sins that we enjoy. We want to be comfortable in our relationship with God and leave things the way they are. But Jesus won't be denied. He comes to us in his word, even when we brush him off. He comes to us in the law in our own hearts and in the words of other Christians even when we try to change the subject and when we make excuses.

Jesus comes to us and he forces us to examine our lives and our hearts. What do we see? Jesus makes us answer that question because there's something wrong with our attitudes and our lives. He forces us to see our sin. But he doesn't stop there. He also shows us his forgiveness. He leads us back to the cross where we see him pay for all that sin that we really don't want to think about. Then he leads us to the empty tomb and makes us see that we are paid for. He comforts and renews our faith. That's why he does all this.

It's not easy for us to go through that. Sometimes, it really hurts to look at ourselves. But Jesus keeps coming because through that pain and sorrow comes repentance. We are sorry for our sins. On the other side of that pain and sorrow comes love and forgiveness. And when we hear that he loves and forgives us we have the power of God. The power to heal and comfort our hearts. And the power to change our lives. Jesus wants us to have that power. So he never stops. No matter how far we drift away from him. No matter how hard we make it, he keeps pursuing us, calling us back to him, calling us to repent. **Jesus insists on reaching us, no matter how hard we try to avoid it.**

Be glad that he does! If it were up to us to keep our faith alive by our power and commitment, sooner or later, we would all fail. If it were up to us, we would all wind up in hell. But Jesus loves us too much for that to happen. He loves us even when we don't know what's good for us. He loves us when we love sin. And he

keeps coming for us. Rejoice in his love and live in repentance. And come to hear about him and his love.
Amen.