

Transformed by Jesus: Samaritan woman at the well

Message for Sunday, March 10, 2013

Scripture: John 4:4-42

Children's Message: John 1:37-42a

There was this girl in a church youth group named Allison. She grew up in a home where they didn't go to church or talk about God. She was a pretty messed up kid who hung around a tough crowd of girls. But another friend brought her to youth group one Friday night and she heard about a mission trip to Mexico where they were going to work with poor people. Allison liked helping others, so she signed up for the trip.

When she got there she was astonished with the poverty. Allison grew up in a home where she had everything. She had tons of clothes and tons of spending money, even enough to support her little drug habit. But here in Mexico she saw little children covered in dirt, playing in the same clothes every day. Despite their surroundings, these children had the biggest smiles on their faces. Allison spent the week with them, watching these children come to the small church in the village and laugh and sing songs, praising Jesus' name. Allison couldn't understand why these poor children were smiling. What did they have to smile about? Allison did understand one thing. She had everything she wanted, and she DIDN'T have a smile like that. But she wanted it. So right there in Mexico, she got down on her knees in the dirt and gave her life to Jesus.

When she got back to school her friends began to notice a change in her. They asked her what was different. So she told them. "You see I went down to Mexico and saw all these poor children who had absolutely nothing. But there was something different about them. They all had a huge smile on their face. And do you know what the smile was from?"

All her friends shook their heads no. "No- what was it?"

"It was Jesus. They all had Jesus in their life. And I know this might sound trippy, but I have him now too. And look!" Allison smiled bigger than she ever smiled in her entire life.

Her friends chuckled at first. "Are you serious?"

Allison quickly replied, "Serious as a heart attack! I found Jesus!"

"Well . . . is he in Mexico?"

"No . . . you can find him here too. Come, I'll show you."

That next Tuesday Allison walked into youth group with four of the SCARIEST LOOKING GIRLS you've ever seen. They wore all black; they had on combat boots; they had pieces of metal sticking out of their body where no one should have metal sticking out of their body. They came in saying, "If this is good enough for Allison, this is good enough for me."

Those girls started coming to that church, just because Allison:

- Jesus came into her life
- She told others about it
- She invited them to come and find out more.

Do you have friends that you can invite to come to church with you next Sunday? Will you do it? I hope so.

Sermon "Transformed by Jesus: Samaritan woman at the well"¹

Introduce the Bible reading

Two weeks ago, we heard John tell how Jesus transformed his life. Let's recall what John had to say about Samaritans, the people who live in the region called Samaria:

People who live there are called Samaritans, and they are a wicked people. They claim to worship the Lord God, but they're fakes. We Jews have nothing to do with them. So to get to Jerusalem, we usually cross the Jordan River and walk on the other side, just so we don't have to pollute ourselves by getting near those filthy people. It adds another day to the journey, but it's worth it.

Sermon begins here

For most women, coming to the well to draw water was a highlight for the day. Their friends and neighbours were all there. While they were waiting for their turn to let down the bucket into the deep well, the children played, and they got to visit with one another. They came twice a day: early in the morning, while the air was still cool from the night; and in the evening, after the sun has gone down.

This woman was different. She trudged along the dusty path at noon, her eyes squinting against the blazing sun overhead. She kept her eyes down for another reason,

¹ The core of this message comes from Max Lucado, a wonderful storyteller and preacher in San Antonio, Texas. It's from his book, *Six Hours One Friday*.

though — so she wouldn't see the stares of the others in the village. But she couldn't close her ears:

“Have you heard? She's got a new man!”

“They say she'll sleep with anyone.”

“Shhh. Here she comes now.”

She went to the well at noon because she knew she would be alone.

She was a Samaritan, so she knew the sting of racism. She was a woman, so she had felt the burden of sexism. Plus she'd been married to five men. Five different marriages. Five different beds. Five different rejections. She knew the sound of slamming doors.

She knew what it meant to love and receive no love in return. Her current mate wouldn't even give her a ring — why bother, when he'd only want it back when he's finished with her, too?

Some people go through life hurting, not so much from physical suffering as from the coldness of others. Life seems worthless, meaningless when there is no joy, no light. If there's anyone who knows what that feels like, it's this woman in the Bible.

So she came to the well at noon. She expected silence. She expected solitude. Instead, she found someone who knew her better than she knew herself.

He was seated on the ground: legs outstretched, hands folded, back resting against the well. His eyes were closed. She stopped and looked at him. She looked around. No one else was near. She looked back at him. He was obviously Jewish. What was he doing here? His eyes opened, and her eyes darted away in embarrassment. She went quickly about her task.

Jesus sensed her discomfort, and said the natural thing: “Can I have a drink?” But she was too streetwise to think that all he wanted was a drink. “Since when does one of your kind ask a woman like me for a drink?” She wanted to know what he really had in mind. Her intuition was partly correct. He was interested in more than water. He was interested in her heart.

And so they talked. Who could remember the last time a man had spoken to her with respect?

He told her about a spring of water — living water — that would quench her deepest thirst.

That intrigued her. “Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

He replied, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

Her heart must have sunk. Here was a Jew who didn't care if she was a Samaritan. Here was a man who didn't look down on her as a woman. Here was the closest thing to gentleness she'd ever seen. And now he was asking her about ... that.

Anything but that. Maybe she considered lying. “Oh, my husband? He's away right now.” Maybe she wanted to change the subject. Perhaps she wanted to leave — but she stayed. And she told the truth. “I have no husband.” (Kindness has a way of inviting honesty).

You've heard the rest of the story. I wish you hadn't. I wish you were hearing it for the first time. For if you were, you'd be wide-eyed as you waited to see what Jesus would do next. Why? Because you've wanted to do the same thing as her.

You've wanted to take off your mask. You've wanted to stop pretending. You've wondered what God would do if you opened your door of secret sin.

This woman wondered what Jesus would do. She must have wondered if the kindness would cease when the truth was revealed. *He will be angry. He will leave. He will think I'm worthless too.*

If you've had the same anxieties, then get out your pencil. You'll want to underline Jesus' answer.

“You're right. You've had five husbands, and you're not married to the man you're living with now.”

No criticism. No anger. No lecture on “Look at the mess you've made of your life!”

You see, it wasn't perfection that Jesus was seeking. It was honesty.

The woman was amazed. “I can see that you are a prophet.” In other words, “There is something different about you. Something special.”

Then she asked the question that revealed the gaping hole in her soul.

“Where is God? My people say that he is on this mountain. Your people say that he is in Jerusalem. I don't know where he is.”

Don't you wish you could have been there to see the expression on Jesus' face as he heard those words? Did his eyes fill with tears? Did he smile? Did he look up into the clouds and wink at his father? Of all the places to find a hungry heart — in Samaria!

Of all the Samaritans to be searching for God — a woman who had been through five divorces?

Of all the people to be chosen to personally receive the news the world had been waiting for — an outcast among outcasts?

Isn't this remarkable: Jesus didn't reveal his secret to King Herod. He didn't request an audience with the Temple leaders. He didn't hold a press conference in the market square.

No, it was in the shade of a well in a rejected land to an ostracized woman. His eyes must have danced as he whispered the secret.

“You're looking for the Messiah. I am the Messiah.”

The most important phrase in the chapter is one easily overlooked:

John 4:28-29, Today's English Version:

Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?”

Don't miss the drama of the moment. Look at her eyes, wide with amazement. Listen to her as she struggles for words. “Y-y-y-you a-a-are the M-m-m-messiah!” And watch as she scrambles to her feet, takes one last look at this grinning Galilean, turns and almost runs into the returning disciples. She almost falls, regains her balance, and races off to her village.

Did you notice what she forgot? She forgot her water jar — the very purpose for her coming out to the well. Because now she has a new purpose!

Suddenly the shame of her tattered romances has disappeared. Her worthless life has suddenly become valuable. “God is here! God has come! God cares... about me!”

That is why she forgot her water jar. That is why she ran to the city. That is why she grabbed the first person she saw and announced her discovery, “I just talked to a man who knows everything I ever did... and he loves me anyway!”

The disciples offered Jesus some food. He refused it — he was too excited! He had just done what he does best. He had taken a life that was drifting and given it direction. He had found someone who was running on “empty,” and had filled her with new life.

He still does today.

What a great story! What a great Saviour!

Next Steps:

- Be real with God. Don't pretend to be something you're not. Discover that God still loves you. Wow!
- Share that discovery with someone else, someone who doesn't know God's amazing love.