

Spirit and Truth
John 4:16-26

Outside the Jerusalem Temple, the place where the Jews believed the presence of God dwelt, there used to be a sign that read:

No foreigner may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put blame for the death which will ensue.

Not exactly a welcome mat.

The Jews believed that only they, or someone who adopted their practices and laws and were purified, had access to God. And if someone who was not purified by the law entered into the temple grounds, they contaminated everyone there and offended God.

But outside those sacred walls of the temple, there was another courtyard—called the court of the Gentiles. **(insert picture)** It was a place where those who didn't know the Lord could be close to God. It was a half-way space between the "world" and the holy place. A Dutch theologian named Abraham Kuyper said the court of the Gentiles was a little like the front porch of our homes. He said our front porch is a halfway place where we are at still at home but we are also in our community, in our world. And he went on to say that Christians need to cultivate a front porch presence in the world—spaces where we engage the world and form the world, from a place of grace and truth.

We cannot offer living water to the thirsty if we never meet them. And so we must build a front porch—a halfway place—in our lives and at our Church—where we can share living water.

When we left Jesus and the Samaritan woman the last time I preached, Jesus had offered her living water, water that if she drank of it would quench her thirst forever. And she excitedly took Him up on it:

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."

John 4:15

Water, everlasting water, was a big deal for her—life-changing. Every day she came to Jacob's well to draw water—a place she went hoping not to see anyone because she was a pariah. But it was the one thing she had to do because water is life. We take water for granted. We have the ability turn a handle 15 feet away from our bed and unlimited fresh, clear water comes pouring out. We keep tens of thousands of gallons of water in our pools. We don't have to work for our water like she did. Making sure she had fresh water every day to drink, cook, wash clothes and bodies, was her most important duty. She had to work for her water and work very hard. And she risked rejection every time she did it because everyone had to come to the well every day.

I have had a small taste of having to work for my water on mission trips as have had many of you. This is something that sticks with you because you now labor for something you take for granted. Rather than turning on a tap, you carry a bucket of water from a source. In all those cases, you measure very carefully just how you use and what you do with your water.

A drink on a hot day? Absolutely.

Washing your hands? Most of the time.

Cooking? If necessary.

Taking a shower? Eh...maybe. It might be easier to just breathe through your mouth!

After you have lived like that for a week or so, when you get home and turn on the tap or slide that glass into the cavity on refrigerator door and cool water comes tumbling out, it seems like a miracle.

Free, cool, clear water. Amazing.

Just about 1/3 of the world doesn't have water in their home.

Coincidentally, just about 1/3 of Edmond doesn't know Jesus.

In the Church we are used to the idea of God's free grace. We are used to twisting the tap of the Gospel and experiencing the free grace and love of Jesus Christ come tumbling out. But a lot of our community is either going to a spiritual well with dirty water or they are dying of thirst.

We have something this world needs—the living water of Jesus. We have what this world craves and needs and too often we take it for granted. We don't understand the great gift we have—the grace and love and favor of the Living God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. We just have to put ourselves right at the fount of grace and the living water pours out.

This the water of life, the living water Jesus was offering her. He was giving her something much greater than she even knew. That's why He asked His next question, a question that took the conversation, again, in a way she did not expect.

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

John 4:16

She was dreading this question. She was hoping that this man, this foreigner from Galilee, didn't know who she was. Her marriages were the defining characteristic of who she was—until she met Jesus.

The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

John 4:17-18

We don't know why this woman had had five husbands or what led her to be intimate with a man now who was not her husband. Some assume she was a prostitute or a woman with loose morals. I don't think that's the case. The most likely scenario is that she was barren, unable to bear children and so her husbands kept divorcing her to have children with someone else who was physically capable.

So, this woman knew rejection on many levels. She knew the rejection of a community who would have believed she was cursed because she was unable to have children. They would have avoided her at all costs lest whatever gods they worshipped believed they condoned whatever unknown sin cursed her. She also knew rejection personally. Because only a man could divorce his wife. Five times she had been told by a man to whom she had committed her life, "Leave me." And now, likely for provision and protection she was with a man who so poorly regarded by the community or just simply poor that marriage was not an option.

And when Jesus repeated her life history back to her, He did something that no one else did.

Jesus didn't reject her. He didn't marginalize her. He didn't condemn her. Instead, He let her know, "I know who you are, and I choose to be with you." He let her know, "I know your history. I know how people look at you. I know how you struggle. Everyone may judge you. But I don't."

She was astonished because she was viewed as a failed commodity and shunned. And now a stranger, a Jewish man, her enemy, said, "I see you."

Jesus excels at this. He saw the woman at the well—when society shamed and shunned her.

Jesus saw the lame man who laid by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years when everyone stepped over him to jump into the water.

Jesus saw the woman in Capernaum who bled for 12 years and spent every shekel she had on doctors to heal her.

Jesus saw Zacchaeus sitting high in a sycamore tree and said, "I am coming to your house today, Zacchaeus."

Jesus saw the blind beggar by the side of the road who told by the crowd to be quiet when he cried out "Son of David have mercy on me!"

And He sees you and me. He sees you just as you are. He knows everything. There is not a thought hidden. Before a word in on your tongue, He perceives it. He knows what you have done. He knows what you should have done. He knows your fears. He knows your doubts. He knows the secret sin that you tremble to name.

And He says, "I want to give you cool, clear, clean, living water. Let's you and I share eternity an eternity or refreshment and renewal."

Jesus gives this gift to us. It's without cost...to us at least.

But it comes with an obligation—to do the same for others. Jesus won't take His love away if we don't practice it. But when we don't practice this kind of radical hospitality for others, when we draw up battle lines and place borders and barriers and boundaries where Jesus has torn them down, we don't know the joy of being seen without condemnation. When we risk nothing to do for others what Jesus has done for us and act out of fear and self-interest, we don't know the fullness of grace.

Like the Samaritan woman, the world expects the Church to condemn and put them on the outside looking in. That's how the world usually works because most people live out of fear. Most people are using both hands to just hold on rather than grasping truth in one hand and love in the other. Most people do not have the reservoirs of grace to simply be with someone whose worldview, whose lifestyle, whose choices are radically opposed to theirs.

But when we are filled with the Holy Spirit we can. When we are filled with the living water of Jesus, we can. Jesus gives us the ability to meet people not where we want them to be but where they are.

And that's what our Living Water campaign is all about.

It is about being a Church where people are seen, where they can share who they are, where grace subverts prejudices. It doesn't mean we compromise the truth of God's Word. We won't. Jesus certainly didn't. Everything Jesus did pointed to the truth of Who He is. He never compromised the truth.

The more confident we are in the truth of Jesus, the better we carry that truth into places and situations and among people where the truth is an absolute stranger. People receive a challenging truth so much easier when they are seen. And the Samaritan who had had five husbands and was with a man currently who was not willing and able to marry her was no exception.

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

John 4:19-25

It's a bad idea to get into a theological debate with God. That is a debate you are not going to win! The Samaritan woman said our people worship on this mountain—meaning Mount Gerizim—which was right by the ancient well where they were talking. And she went on to your people, the Jews, worship in Jerusalem, on another mountain, Mount Moriah. And she subtly asserted "There is no compromise here. We both cannot be right. Either God is on Gerazim or He is on Moriah. He can't be in both places."

Amazingly enough, God was standing right in front of her—preparing to reveal Himself to her. The Samaritan woman had been seen so we she was ready to receive the truth.

If you came to our early Living Water campaign meetings, you heard part of this story about a trip I made to California a couple months ago for our denomination's national meeting. A pastor friend of mine and hung out one night at a place that had fire pit in the back yard. We wandered out there and four men were sitting around that fire pit. We sat down and within a few minutes they asked us, "Why are you in California?" We told them we are couple of Presbyterian pastors there for a conference. That's usually a recipe for shutting down the conversation. Believe it or not most people you meet out and about aren't

looking to sit down and have a long conversation with someone who has multiple theological degrees. You would be surprised how often people suddenly get busy when a pastor shows up!

But these guys stayed put. And one of them began peppering us with leading, skeptical theological questions. He was an African-American man in his early sixties. Steven is his name. Two nights before around those same chairs with those same men, Steven renounced his faith. He was a fallen away Presbyterian who couldn't find any answers to his questions, and there was a militant atheist limo driver named sitting around that same circle who was only too happy to feed his doubts and fears and he had done that for years.

48 hours later two Presbyterian pastors showed up in that same circle, packing answers to his questions but what we had that particular night that was most important was a willingness to see him, to meet where he was and simply offer the living water of Jesus Christ.

After an hour of conversation that man rededicated his life to Jesus. He was in tears and began praising God who had brought two Presbyterian pastors to where he sat to share Jesus with him.

Not too long ago, I would have tried to debate Steven and the other guys around the circle. I would have tried to win and not out of ego, not out of a desire to prove my intelligence or education but out of a desire to prove the truth.

And there is definitely a time and a place for that. I will be the last one to tell you to not speak the truth. But with people who don't know Jesus it's not just enough to speak the truth—we must live the truth. And the truth is they matter to God. The truth is Jesus sees them right where they are and we need to as well.

Jesus could have debated the Samaritan woman and won. He could have shown her that the Temple at Jerusalem was the real place to worship the Lord. We know that Jesus went there every year of His life from the time He was a boy. We know that on one of those trips when He was twelve years old, He stayed behind in the temple while His family made the 100-mile trip back home. We know that He took at least seven trips there during His ministry.

The temple at Jerusalem wasn't unimportant to Jesus. It was very important to Him. He called it "My Father's house." But the temple at Jerusalem was not more important to Him than this Samaritan woman standing in front of Him who had been rejected by the world.

So, He didn't try to win the debate. Instead, He won her to Himself. He didn't to prove something. Instead, He tried to show her someone—Himself.

Jesus said the place where people worshipped was not nearly as important as how we worship. He said, we must worship in spirit and truth. And the woman responded that she knew the Messiah, the Christ is coming and when He does, He will tell us exactly that the truth is.

And then, when she was told Jesus she was ready for the truth, He gave it to her. Jesus pointed to the greatest truth anyone can know.

And Jesus said to her "I who speak to you am he."

John 4:26