

I. Advanced Organizer

- A. Story of writing a blog post; people sharing it. Someone read it, quoted it, and then said, “I think even those not part of his congregation can take it to heart”. Presumption of maleness. I don’t fit the category. People by and large hear pastor, and still assume male. Church starter, even more so. I’m more than the category I supposedly fit in. This creates a disconnect.
- B. OT - story of people being disconnected, God making places for the to reconnect
- C. Then Jesus comes at last - John 1 - “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

II. John 4 - A familiar story; looking at it today through fresh eyes.

- A. Part 1: ***Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” 2 —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— 3 he left Judea and started back to Galilee. 4 But he had to go through Samaria. 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.”

1. What do we know so far?

- a) “Had to go through Samaria”. Not necessarily geographically, but perhaps there are other reasons Jesus felt in necessary.
- b) Stop at a well. Not the first time Jewish readers of the Bible would hear a story of important things happening at a well. Hebrew Bible featured multiple well stories.
 - (1) Woman Rebekah tended a servant of Isaac, gave him water for his camels at a well, which became a sign that she was the woman Isaac should marry. She became a matriarch of Israel.
 - (2) Generation later, Jacob stopped for water at a well and fell in love with the woman he met there, Rachel.
 - (3) Moses met his wife, Zipporah at a well, too
 - (4) More than just the Tinder of Biblical period.
 - (5) Consider Hagar, the servant given to Abram by Sarai so she could be a surrogate mother, but finds herself despised by her mistress when she becomes pregnant so she runs into the desert and encounters God at a well. She names the well “The well of the one who sees me” because she meets a miraculous God who notices her and promises to care for the child she will bear.
 - (6) All this background gives us a clue that the story we are about to hear has resonance. Wells have been important connecting places, and once again this one will be.

2. So we have Jesus and we have a Samaritan woman. And immediately the storyteller seems to indicate that what we might think of as a pretty innocent exchange, is extremely unusual.
 - a) The woman is incredulous.
 - b) John says, "Jews did not share things in common with Samaritans". Bit of an understatement
 - (1) Some background on Samaritans and Jews.
 - (a) Samaritans are the descendants of the Israelites that remained when most tribes were carried off. Intermarried with Assyrians. Share the same origin story but have some distinctive practices; namely where they worship. Do not observe Jerusalem as central place of worship. Bitter conflict through the years.
 - (b) On a practical level, this means that Jews see Samaritans as ceremonially unclean; like Gentiles, but with perhaps greater hostility because of their religious ties.
 - (c) Pharisees would pray that none of them would be raised in resurrection.
 - (d) To touch something they touched would make you unclean. "daughters of the Samaritans are menstruants from their cradle".
 - c) She is a woman.
 - (1) Taboo for a man to speak to a woman in public; especially a rabbi.
 - d) She's alone. Collecting water alone in the middle of the day. May be a clue that she's an outcast. Even without knowing more about her background at this point; a clue that she's disconnected.
 - e) Through at least three levels of disconnection, Jesus reaches, and asks her for a drink.
3. He makes a pitch to her that he has access to something she doesn't - "living water", or "flowing water".
4. **Point 1: Jesus is more concerned with connection than convention.**

B. Part 2

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."

1. So Jesus reaches out to this woman with this provocative offer of "living water" and she bites. And then it gets extra weird.
 - a) He tells her to call her husband. In a sense, would have been the respectful, proper thing to do. It's already taboo that he's talking to her in public, but to give something

valuable to a woman could be even more easily misinterpreted, and so to protect her own reputation, convention would say that he should invite her husband to be present. But in this case, we also know more is going on.

- b) Here is where it becomes clear this woman is more than just a list of taboo characteristics. She is an individual who is shaped by a unique story.
 - c) By bringing up the issue of marriage, and by Jesus revealing that he knows about her history, he's bringing her story to the forefront.
2. Her story is a sensitive one, but I'd like to suggest it may not be for the reasons the church has often preached.
- a) traditionally this has been an opportunity to say this woman has loose morals. She's a sexual sinner of some sort, because she's had so many men and now seems to live with a man who's not her husband.
 - b) This interpretation may be more a consequence of the church's preoccupation with sexual morality and individual responsibility, rather than acknowledging the cultural and circumstantial factors that are at play.
 - c) Women in Africa read this story and immediately see a different interpretation. The woman is infertile. Much more likely to be the case.
 - (1) Women in this time could not initiate divorce. So if she had been the victim of multiple divorces, it was not her own fault. If she's had five husbands, likely she's been rejected multiple times. Perhaps some have died. Most likely if she has been rejected multiple times, it's because she's unable to do the task that wives in a patriarchal culture were required to do: bear children for their husbands. It's quite possible that she's suffered tragedy upon tragedy - rejection by her husbands, rejection from other women because she's unable to bear children. If she's currently living with a man who is not her husband, it is likely she's now been made a concubine, or sexual slave, taken in and provide for so she has a roof over her head, but of little value to anyone she's connected to. Her story is a desperate one. And Jesus knows it.
3. **Point 2: Jesus connects to people by connecting to their real life stories.**
- a) Why bring it up? I don't think Jesus is trying to shame her. He's giving her a chance to be known. He even affirms her for speaking some truth about who she is. Not condemned. He's making it clear that whatever others think about her, he's not turned away. He knows who she is and wants to connect with her just the same. **Likely very different than any man she's met before.**
 - b) Which is probably why when things get personal, and she senses that there is more going on with this guy than she first realized, it's a little too close to home. She starts talking theological. She goes for the subject that will introduce some distance between them.
 - (1) *Oakland As vs. SF Giants. Or Raiders vs. 49ers.*
 - c) Jesus doesn't take the bait. He's not as interested in what separates them. He's more interested in what has the capacity to transcend their differences and unite them.
 - d) Seems to be saying - I'm not so concerned about *where* people worship. I'm concerned about how they worship and who they worship.
 - (1) The Father is looking for people who worship in **spirit and truth**. Not two separate things. One thing with both qualities. "Truly Spiritual" worship. Worship informed by God's Spirit itself. Worship that flows from the fountain of Living water. Later Jesus would talk about the Holy Spirit as the source of Living Water, that comes from within. He's inviting this woman to imagine a period where her connection to ultimate

reality and joy, to love, to life, to God comes not through her status, not through her religious observance, not through her community engagement, but through God's presence in her life that flows from her like a source of pure water.

- e) She's eager. Thirty for what he's describing, but it feels too good to be true that this man could deliver what he describes. "I know that Messiah is coming." She declares. I believe there really something more going on. It has to be better than this. This painful life can't be all there is. Someday the Anointed One, the Christ will come and explain it, right?
- f) Here is the greatest moment of connection we've seen so far in John's gospel. Jesus turns to this Samaritan woman and says, "I am he." I am he. I am the Messiah.
 - (1) The nexus point of heaven and earth
 - (2) The hope that is to come
 - (3) The one who will help people connect with the Living God. "I am here. And I am revealing myself to YOU." She is the first one to get it. To hear it. To understand who he is. The individual with the least amount of privilege, with the most barriers to inclusion is the first to receive the clear revelation that God's anointed one has come; that God's rescue plan is being enacted. Word become flesh.

(4) God is turning convention on its head because he desperately cares about connection.

C. Part 3: ***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..."

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."

- 1. Disciples don't get what has just happened. All they can see is convention. All they see is the taboos that have just been violated. But Jesus and the Samaritan woman both have experienced something more. They've shared an intimate moment of real connection. And that connection brings a new kind of life.
- 2. Jesus uses two powerful images to communicate this new way of life that comes from having connection to God and to his activity in the world.
 - a) First, it's the image of water. Not just any water. Flowing, living water. That's different than the stagnant water in the well. The people of God have been drinking from the same well for millennia, but it's stagnant. It's stale. There's still something there but it doesn't satisfy long term. But Jesus is proposing this new way of life. This connection that satisfies continually. That never gets stagnant. That's always fresh.

- b) The image of food. “I have food to eat that you don’t know about”. I am satisfied by participating in the work of the Father. The work of God in our midst.
- 3. Point 3: **Connecting to Jesus brings a new kind of fresh, fruitful, satisfying life.** It brings it for the woman. It brings it for Jesus.
- 4. For the woman - her connection to Jesus opens up connection with the world around her. She can’t help but share her personal encounter. Her story becomes part of a much bigger story. She becomes the first witness to the Messiah. And folks flock to him. At the end, she is surrounded by community. She has moved from profound disconnection to profound connection, because Jesus has transcended the conventional boundaries, he’s seen her individual story, and he’s connected with her there in a way that brings fresh satisfying life.

III. What about us?

- A. We find ourselves in a time of intense cultural division. We have our own deep sibling rivalries like the Samaritans vs. the Jews.
 - 1. **Conservatives and Liberals.** To paraphrase humorist Dave Berry: “Republicans think of Democrats as godless, unpatriotic, Volvo-driving, France-loving, elitist latte guzzlers, whereas Democrats dismiss Republicans as ignorant, NASCAR-obsessed, gun-fondling religious fanatics.”
 - 2. With the current election climate the rancor is particularly bad. Anxiety is real
 - a) Psychologists across the country reporting spikes of anxiety in their clinical practices worse than they’ve ever seen
 - (1) “Election Stress Disorder”
 - (2) “Election Anxiety”
 - (3) “Trump-Induced Anxiety”
 - b) divisions becoming stronger; even within the church, Christians feeling the need to define themselves against other Christians
- B. What might Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman invite us into in this season?
 - 1. **First, an invitation to go beyond arguments about beliefs, and connect with one another’s stories.**
 - a) I understand the desire to block everyone on Facebook who posts stuff you don’t agree with. But this only brings more division.
 - b) Instead, look for the people you disagree with that you share enough relational trust with, and ask them with genuine curiosity, “Tell me the story about why this is important to you.” Not about the party platform, what draws you personally to this candidate, to this party, to this way of thinking about government. How did you come to believe in this?
 - (1) none of us want to fall into the trap that both of our leading candidates have fallen into of simply dismissing other human beings we disagree with. We can profoundly disagree with someone, while still believing that in their core, they are made in the image of God, and they have a legitimate life story to tell that informs the way they see the world. Are we willing to hear one another’s stories, even if the narratives they point to challenge our own?
 - 2. **Second, an invitation to consider how our own stories are connected to the bigger story we understand ourselves to be a part of.**
 - a) Have you taken the time to consider how you’d answer those questions. How does your lived story influence your particular view of the world? How does it influence what you’re passionate about and what you see as a lesser issue? How does it influence how you vote

- b) How does your connection with Jesus influence what story you are in? How do you think about Jesus' unique role as connector between humanity and divinity? What about the role he gave his followers in living out his mission? Are you participating in the connecting of humanity? What would that mean?

3. Finally, an invitation to experience the refreshing, satisfying power of God's Spirit flowing within us.

- a) My experience walking back from the liquor store with Jesus
(1) 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."
- b) Our hope is not ultimately in our political system (though we have a role to play as participants). It's not ultimately in our leaders (though we should care about our leadership). But ultimately, our source of life is the flowing water of God's spirit at work in the world.

C. If time: video about people who went beyond categories and convention, experienced new life.