

GIVING UP SUPERIORITY**John 4:1-42****(Read John 4:1-42)**

Intro: Our talk today is the third in our Lenten series, GIVING IT UP. For those of you who are fasting from something during Lent, how is that going? What are you learning from it? I've learned that I can give up Oreos and chocolate chip cookies and that I don't miss Facebook at all. I've also learned from these messages. One of the beautiful things about preparing a sermon is how much the preacher gets to learn in the process. Any preacher who doesn't learn from what he or she preaches probably needs to give up preaching – and not just for Lent.

Two weeks ago we talked about giving up control. Being a control freak is not a good thing when it causes you to take the place of God as the one who directs your steps.

Last week we talked about giving up expectations. We looked at how God works in our lives to change the direction we were taking as he sends us on a completely different and wonderful path.

This week's message is, as you can see, Giving Up Superiority. Christ Followers, by nature, and by that I mean having the nature of Christ living in us, are not the kind of people who walk around with their noses in the air. Usually we don't look down on other people – and one reason for that is we remember how far Christ has brought us. But that doesn't mean we don't sometimes struggle with it. We will look at this as we go through the familiar passage I just read to you.

Your bulletin says that the scripture reading was to begin at verse 5. And as you already know, if you were following in your Bible, I began at the beginning of the chapter. This is because as I began studying the text one of the main points I wanted to make was found in the first four verses. It brought to mind. . .

The long cuts we take (1-4)

- Let me explain. I take shortcuts sometimes. If I'm walking home, I might walk through Nikki's yard to get to Fox Haven, or I might walk all the way to the back of our ball field and walk through the back of Joe and Cindy's property and then through Joe and Cindy's property. In case you think I'm repeating myself, I'm not. You see, Joe and Cindy Scott live right next to Joe and Cindy Robinson – in Dale and Margaret Engle's old house. Regardless, if I'm in a particular hurry, but I still want to take a walk, I might take that shortcut. I also haven't quite ever found the quickest way to get to Mansfield. Is it to take Route 30 by driving out CR 1095, or is it to go all the way down Route 42 and hop on Route 30 just north of Mansfield. Shortcuts cut down on time – it's as simple as that.
- But sometimes we take long cuts because we want to avoid something that we need to confront or participate in. Maybe there's somebody that we really need to talk to but we really don't want to, so we avoid them when we see them in the grocery store or even here at church. Or maybe it would be quicker to take a certain route through a certain town, but there are people there that you don't know about or are different from you and so you take a long cut rather than a shortcut.
- The Jews of Jesus day always took a long cut when they wanted to travel from the province of Judea to the province of Galilee in the north. To do this they would cut east across the Jordan River then north on the eastern side of the Jordan until they crossed the river again just south of the Sea of Galilee to arrive in the province of the same name. Now, why did they do that? Well, it's because they didn't want to meet up with any Samaritans because they hated Samaritans. They considered them a lesser race. They considered them half-breeds who had married heathens. So they avoided the entire region by taking a long cut. They went to a lot of trouble because of their sense of superiority.
- Fortunately – and we need to imitate this – Jesus didn't fall for that kind of carrying on. Instead . . .

Jesus took the direct route (5-6)

- Opposition to Jesus in Judea was heating up which he would deal with in due time, but for now he had some ministering that he needed to do in Galilee – so off he went – straight north. He wasn't interested in the nonsense of taking the long cut out into the heathen lands east of the Jordan – nope, he traveled directly north towards Galilee. Besides he had a mission to the Samaritans and he rejected the institutional prejudice that made his fellow Jews avoid the Samaritans.

- So we find him as he arrives at Jacob's Well in the town of Sychar. Our text says that it's about the 6th hour. If you are going by Jewish time, that was about noon and if by Roman time it would have been about 6:00 PM. Two things indicate that it was noon: one is, John being a good Jew, recorded it that way and the other reason is eventually obvious when . . .

A Samaritan woman showed up (7-15)

- It's likely noon when she shows up, in the heat of the day, to get water. She chose this time because she wanted to avoid other people who looked down at her and, truthfully, wanted to avoid her. The women of the town would normally have come for water in the morning before the heat got too intense or late in the day when things had cooled down. This lady came in the blazing noon-day sun
- Our text tells us, Jesus spoke to her. There were a number of things "wrong" with this.
 - A Jewish man never spoke to a woman other than his wife or his daughter or daughter-in-law. It just wasn't done. For some Jewish men (certainly not all) women were considered a lower form of life. There was, and I think there might still be, a prayer where a man thanks God for not making him a woman, a gentile, or a slave. Jesus was breaking protocol by talking to a woman.
 - The horrific thing, to a Jewish observer and in fact, it later shows up in the response of his disciples -- Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman! With what Jews thought of Samaritans, and what Samaritans thought of Jews, a Jewish man should never speak to a Samaritan and certainly not a Samaritan woman. But Jesus had a mission and this woman was going to be the perfect example of that mission. He came to seek and to save the lost. That's he said in Luke 19 when he asked Zacchaeus to come down from the tree. Remember, Zacchaeus was from another group that Jews loved to hate – tax collectors. Jesus's mission was to show that his Father has a plan for all people, even the ones that we look down our noses at.
- Jesus's mission for this woman and for all rejected peoples – and for all humanity – is living water. She was quite surprised that he was talking to her as he engages her in friendly conversation and shares with her about living water. Then he takes the conversation deeper . . .

Go get me your husband

- "Oops! I don't have a husband." Jesus commends her for not lying. But then he shows that he has caught her in her little white truth. The truth is, she'd been married five times but she's been unlucky at love and is no longer married to any of those men – and worse, she's not married to the man she's with now.
- What I love about this is that there is no judgment from Jesus – only love. He wasn't looking down his nose at this relationship loser, instead he was ministering to her. This is a reminder for us to check our haughty attitude at the door when it comes to ministering to people who have failed miserably at relationships?
- Well, this cut a little close for the woman so she did what lots of us do when it gets a little uncomfortable. . .

Change the subject

- The Samaritan woman is essentially saying "Let me try some theology on you." Now, think about it, she is trying theology on the one that theology is all about, so it didn't work very well. But she didn't quite know that so she forged ahead anyway, "Let's not talk about relationships. Let's talk about proper worship. Where do you say we should worship? We say we should worship right here at the foot of Mount Gerizim, but you Jews think that you should only worship in Jerusalem where the Temple is. Where do you think we should worship?"
- Jesus replies: "Worship will be turned on its head. Worship won't just happen here, and it won't just happen in Jerusalem. Worship is going to happen everywhere where God's people are. This is because the message isn't just going to be for Samaritans or Jews only, the Good News is for all of humanity. Whoever is redeemed by the living water will worship where they are.
- Now she's taken back. . .

Can this be the Christ?

- Okay you win -- get your own water. I need to go tell the same people I've been avoiding, the same people who have been ostracizing me, about this amazing man who told me everything about myself. The man who knew everything about me and yet he still loved me and offered me real life.

- By now the disciples had returned. In fact, they had heard the closing comments of the discussion between their rabbi and a SAMARITAN WOMAN! But it didn't last for long because they have been with him long enough that nothing surprised them anymore. Or so they thought. So they kept their thoughts to themselves.
- Instead they tell him he should eat something since they had gone to all the trouble to get him lunch. And that's when . . .

Jesus moved from Living Water to the food that nourished his mission

- Jesus was fed by his obedience to his Heavenly Father to share the Good News. And then he talked about the harvest – which was still four months away! The fields are white for the harvest NOW and NOT four months from now. It's time for harvest NOW. It's right now that people need the Lord. So the problem is not that the fields aren't ready, it's because God's people aren't willing.
- It's still true. God's people waste time worrying about other things like what translation is most accurate or what worship music is best or which denomination is closest to God or which baptism is best or which candidate we should support while people are dying of thirst for the Living Water.
- Jesus says “Get over it!” You know the rest of the story – the disciples did get over it. It'll be fun to see how they did that when we get back into our study of Acts after Easter. They got a taste of it here as they stuffed down their prejudice and superiority and celebrated the fact that many Samaritans believed.

Conclusion: The good news or living water is for everyone who hears it and then receives it. No one's too good for it. No one's too bad for it. So, let's give up any kind of superiority that keeps us from sharing the good news. Amen.