

***IN UNEXPECTED PLACES*****John 4:1-30****(Read John 4:1-30)**

**INTRO:** I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Recess was over and it was time to go back in the building. So as usual we lined up by grades, one line for 4<sup>th</sup>, one line for 5<sup>th</sup>, and one line for 6<sup>th</sup>. There were three teachers with us and we were to be silent in the line and wait to be dismissed into the school building. I looked over and I touched the sleeve of the new jacket of the 6<sup>th</sup> grader to my left. I don't at all recall what I said, but I said something, not much, but something. Then I looked back to the front of the line. I noticed Mr. Holiday walking down the line. This was not unusual, so I thought nothing of it. Then he stopped. Beside me. And I caught something out of my peripheral vision that me look up at him and what I remember in my episodic memory was this huge man standing over me in a Godzilla destroying New York pose (portray). And he proceeded to yell at me for not be silent in the line. The tirade seemed to take an eternity but was probably only seconds and we were dismissed into the building. The experience was scarring for a number of reasons three of them being, 1) I never before or after was yelled at by a teacher like that – I was a good kid – so I was crushed. And 2) I was yelled at in front of 150 kids and that was, as you might expect, humiliating. And 3) My little brother, Steve, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, was one of those 150 kids and that was especially humiliating. Mr. Holiday and I became friends in later years and I actually found out that he was a Christ Follower, but I never told him about how his Godzilla moment left a lasting negative impression on me that still causes a nearly visceral reaction some 50 years later.

I broke the rules and everyone saw the result. I was shamed in front of all of my peers. It was awful.

The Woman at the Well story, found here in our text, is very familiar. If you were raised in the church like many of us were, you've heard it many times. A quick refresher will remind us that Jesus was sitting near Jacob's well, no doubt in the shade, in the middle of the day which is the hottest time of the day. The normal time of day for women (it was women's work) to draw water was in the morning. This was because it was cooler and because it was as they were beginning the cooking and chores of the day, much of which required water. Here was a woman who came to the well in the heat of the day rather than the usual time because she probably didn't feel welcome when the other ladies were there. She probably had a reputation, because, we saw in verse 18 that she had been married 5 times prior to her present relationship in which she was living with a man outside of marriage. This was an extremely rare and scandalous relationship record, even for the filthy Samaritans – which is how they were viewed by the Jews. This was a woman who, as a lifestyle was looking for love in all the wrong places and failing at it – and quite spectacularly. She got little or no love anywhere, from anyone.

When she went out she felt shame greater than any public dressing down a 5<sup>th</sup> grader could ever receive. In fact, she didn't even have to go out to experience that shame – I think it was just who she was.

She was like a lot of people who walk around with their eyes to the ground because they're afraid to look others in the eye. They want to remain invisible and they largely succeed, because it's easy to miss them. Sometimes they're so lonely and self-loathing that they might go shoot up a school or beat their spouse or their children or simply take their own life. We need to stop missing these people. Instead . . .

**We need to see all people as Jesus does**

- Like the woman at the well, everyone is thirsty for Living Water.
- She came to the well and Jesus saw her. She wasn't invisible to him. She wasn't to be avoided because of her reputation or societal restrictions. He saw her, not as a loser at relationships and a sinner – which, in truth, in the eyes of the world and in reality, she was, but he saw her as he sees every one of us – as one of his loved and coveted children who need his mercy and grace. That mercy and grace are free for the taking – but you **MUST** take it. It's not bestowed without your permission.
- And that's where we come in – we need to tell people about it. They need to know its available. So even if they aren't very approachable or their reputation is soiled, we need to be like Jesus and surprise them by breaking through their expectations and previous experiences and show them what Jesus looks like.
- You see, we've already discovered that . . .

**Jesus can be found where we don't expect him**

- Its sad to say that many people actually don't expect to find Jesus in his church. Too often they have experienced or heard about hateful responses from people who say they are Christians. They feel they are

ostracized by Christians in the same way the woman at the well was. They feel the disapproving stares and hear the nasty comments whispered behind the hand.

- I've shared this vivid story from Phil Yancey in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, As a matter of fact, he begins the book with it. He tells the story of his friend who has a conversation with a drug-addicted prostitute who had pimped out her 2 year old daughter. As she expressed the unbelievable guilt and desperation she felt to Yancey's friend, and he asked her "if she had ever thought of going to church for help." Yancey's friend told him "*I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. 'Church!' she cried. 'Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse.'*"
- The other day I read a piece by Gary Thomas that had the title "Why are Christians so mean?" and he made his point in the first paragraph where he quoted Dallas Willard who was asked that very same question, "Why are Christians so mean?" Thomas writes, "*His answer was up to the task. He said that Christians are mean in proportion to when they value being "right" over being "like Christ."*"
- I believe ABC has the balance in pretty good proportion. I believe with all my heart that ABCers are NOT mean Christians. I believe we would swallow our horror at the utter wrongness of a prostitute who did horrible things in her quest for her next heroin fix. I believe we would seek to minister to her and bring her out of her despair and into a relationship with the one who loves her no matter what her sin is. We would do this because we know that is what he did for us. So, we are NOT a church that would be so unapproachable as that prostitute in Yancey's story. But many churches are, and that is the reputation we must live down by seeing people as Jesus does – with compassion and grace.
- You see, it's gotten to the point that, because the church has been maligned, sometimes unfairly, but far too often deservedly, people don't expect Christians to be welcoming and gracious. We are often thought of, with good reason, as judgmental and condemning, when the truth is, true Christ Followers are messengers of hope and redemption.
- We need to change expectations. We need to make it possible for people to again be . . .

### **Finding Jesus in Unexpected Places**

- The encounter this Samaritan woman had at Jacob's well in the mid-day heat was not what she envisioned at all. She expected condemnation, she got acceptance. She expected an argument about, proper gender roles and relationships and she got a promise of living water. She expected rebuke for her marital history and she got a gentle reminder of her need for real love. She expected a debate on politics and worship and she got introduced to the one who is King of kings and worthy of all worship.
- Every stock argument she knew got thrown out in Jesus direction and he never took the bait. He saw what she was up to. And best of all, he saw her exactly as she was, and he still loved her and offered her living water, which is life altering change and life eternal.
- We get to offer that living water to lost souls too. Just when they least expect it, we can be Jesus to them and see into their souls and see their need rather than what presents on their exterior. The exterior we see might be outright hostility and defensiveness or confusion about faith or sexual identity or what they need to medicate their deep woundedness. There can be any number of things that make a hard crust over their need for the thirst quenching river of life.
- We too will get the stock questions and the stock arguments that are designed to throw us off balance like: "Can God make a rock that is too big for him to lift?" Or "How can I believe in a God of love who allows children to be sold into sex slavery?" or "How do I know Jesus is the only way to heaven?" or "Aren't all religions the same?". All of them are designed, not for reasonable argument, but to deflect the spotlight off the fact that everyone has a hole in their soul into which only Jesus can fit. Only he can fit there because it says here in this Bible that he is the way and the truth and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6).
- Maybe someone here in this room has that need for living water. If this is speaking to you I want to speak to you or you can come up to the prayer circle or you can find Lori and talk to her. Don't be thirsty any more.
- One more thing and then we're done . . .

### **We need to go looking**

- How many of you know someone like this woman who needs living water? Every day you will come in contact with people who are furtively coming to the well in the heat of the day looking for something that will not satisfy them for long. They need living water and you have a divine appointment to bring them buckets of it.
- That means we need to go looking which is what Jesus did. Hidden here in this passage is an often overlooked idea. It says in verse 4, *Now he had to go through Samaria*. He **HAD** to go through Samaria. Jews didn't normally travel the way Jesus did. (Explain) But Jesus **HAD** to. The implication in the original language was that Jesus was compelled to go through Samaria and it's because he had an appointment with a woman who needed to be made new.
- We need to be compelled too. We need to go looking and we must not be surprised by who God sends our way. In verse 27 it says *Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman*. My question as I read that verse is, "Are we surprised by who God redeems?" We shouldn't be, he redeemed us. Let's boldly share Jesus. Let's pour out the Living Water. (Tell about Rosie inviting Mormons and Jews in)

**Conclusion:**

Let's be different. Let's not be mean. Let's bring living water. Let's take Jesus to unexpected places. Amen.