

Living Water

John 4:1-42

Introduction of self:

- Grew up in the Fraser Valley – East Chilliwack on a dairy farm.
- Attended MEI, Bethany Bible Institute (reference to Len and Lil Dueckman)
- After a career in the tech world served, along with Martha, in Kenya with MCC as country directors/Reps (2008-2013)
- Currently attend Sardis Community church (reference Dave Heinrichs and his previous pastoral role at Sardis)
- Acknowledge the support that MCC BC receives from Eagle Ridge (thank Eagle Ridge)

Read:

John 4: 1-14

Introduction of sermon:

In “What’s so amazing about Grace” by Phillip Yancey, Phillip Yancey tells the story of a conference that was being held in Great Britain on comparative religions. During the conference, a group of scholars began to discuss what belief, if any, was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the discussion about?" he asked, and heard that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." (*What's So Amazing about Grace?*)

That’s certainly not the only appropriate answer, but it’s absolutely correct. God reveals himself in the Old Testament as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loyal love (grace) and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6) and the display of his grace only becomes richer and fuller, until it climaxes in the Lord Jesus, who is “full of grace and truth.”

It’s why we resonate with the song “Amazing Grace”, and why the writer of that hymn, John Newton, a man with a terrible track record of sin said at the end of his life, “Two things I remember: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.” And that grace changes everything.

Sometimes people ask about the difference between mercy and grace – they are not the same thing. Mercy is not getting what we deserve; grace is getting the very opposite of what we deserve, and the heart of the gospel is that we are saved by grace, we stand in grace, we are kept by grace, and we grow in grace. There are many places where we see that grace poured out through our Lord Jesus, but none any more significant than in the story we are going to look at this morning, from John 4, as a

woman with no claim for salvation, has an encounter with the Lord Jesus that makes her a recipient of this amazing grace.

The Gospel of John describes a number of amazing and surprising encounters of Jesus. Just think for a moment about:

- Cleansing of the temple
- Encounter with Nicodemus
- Healing of the official's son; healing at the pool of Bethesda
- Feeding of 5 thousand.

In the midst of these is an encounter with a Samaritan women. John 4:1-38 is the story with the participants being Jesus, the disciples and the women. Then v. 39-42 expand the participants to include the town. We will spend most of our time discussing the encounter with the women.

Context:

First some context --

Why does Jesus travel from/leave Judea?

- First because of a rumour. And, like most rumors it was not entirely true but it was partly true. Again, like most rumours.
- Reports that Jesus was baptizing more people than John. Fact of the matter is that Jesus did not baptize.
- Crowds flocking to see and hear and witness Jesus were growing.
- So, Jesus heads north – planning to go to Galilee – a distance of about 80 miles (3 days journey)

Why Samaria? Verse 4 says “he HAD to go through Samaria”. At first reading this might be taken to mean that the “only road to Galilee was through Samaria”. In fact, that is not true. Many devout Jews would avoid Samaria at all costs. Devout Jews would cross east over the Jordan, head north until they were “past Samaria” and then re-cross the Jordan to reach Galilee.

There were intense feelings against the Samaritans. They were related to the Jews but were considered “not true or pure Jews” because of intermarrying. In many ways the Samaritans of Jesus time are similar to the Palestinians of today. And, indeed much of Samaria is today known as West Bank. Good Jews of Jesus day would not go through Samaria.

The road to Galilee from Judea was most direct by going through Samaria. When verse 4 says that Jesus “had to go through Samaria” it is referring to divine necessity

– not due to roads but rather due to a divine appointment with a woman. An appointment that the woman knew nothing about.

About 1 ½ days into the journey, Jesus, with his disciples reaches Sychar. Sychar is the Samaritan centre of worship (what Jerusalem was to the Jews).

Encounter with the woman:

If this was a play, the program notes would provide the context and this would be the first Act. Jesus is weary and sends his disciples away and rests near the well. This well is a heritage site (Jacob built the well). We understand that this well is still in operation today – 100 feet deep and still providing water.

As Jesus rests a woman shows up. A couple of things about the woman:

- She is a peasant. Upper class or richer Samaritans would have had servants to fetch water.
- She comes at mid day. The normal time to draw water is not “in the heat of the day”. She is probably coming to avoid gatherings and gossip – we are about to find out why.

There are **4 barriers** that are obvious:

- Ethnic. She is a Samaritan, Jesus is a Jew”. Devout Jews would pray “may our eyes never look on a Samaritan”
- Religious. Samaritans accepted the Torah – first five books of the Old Testament but did not accept any other books (prophets). And, the Samaritans changed some parts of the Torah [as other religions also do – Koran has Abraham offering Ishmael, rather than Isaac]
- Gender. Jewish men did not talk to women, especially if alone. This was a very big deal. As we see in verse 27 later in the passage, the disciple’s first response was “What are you doing talking to this woman”.
- Morality. It soon surfaces that this woman has lived with 5 husbands and is currently living in a “come we stay” relationship. She is marginalized, it is why she has come alone to draw water at noon when no other women or servants will be there. Jewish authorities, the Pharisees, had no place for this woman – on many counts.

We face similar barriers in our lives. The definition of “the others” for us might be different today – it may be religious beliefs, sexuality, ethnicity, places of origin, refugees, and white extremists – but Jesus’ example of overcoming these barriers is something that we are called to.

Given the four barriers of ethnicity, religion, gender and morality, Jesus initiates the conversation with her:

V 7 – “Give me a drink”. The result is startled response from the woman – not to do with water, but “why are you, a Jew talking to me, asking for drink”?

Jesus then takes this to another level referring to living water. Living water in this context refers to **running water, moving water, not stale water**. What Jesus knows is that this woman, has both a physical and a soul thirst (as do we).

She responds with ‘where will you get this running water. You have nothing to draw with and she refers to Jacob/Israel. Are you greater??’ She is a feisty woman. While she might be immoral she is not broken. She is actively engaging with this Jewish male.

Jesus responds to her on two levels:

- Thirst of this water is physical
- What I can offer is eternal life. V14

Read of her soul – her inner needs. He is offering her running water – salvation and gift of God in her life. In the OT, living water is used to describe God.

All you need to do is ask. (verse 10)

No pre-qualifying. We need to understand that our own “good works” multiplied by a million amount to nothing.

She responds asking for physical water.

Jesus then makes it clear that he knows her story, the life that she has lived, the life that she is living. This would disqualify her immediately. Even as the story of her life, her immoral living becomes evident, **Jesus does not withdraw the offer of living water, eternal life.** Jesus speaks to her with grace and truth.

From where to who, from where to how:

Read John 4: 19-26

v.20 shows an interesting response from the woman. On one hand it sounds as if she is trying to change the subject, that things have become too personal for her. That is possible but Jesus makes the question irrelevant. The woman has introduced the topic of “where do you worship’ (the tension between Jerusalem and Mt. Garison in Sychar).

Jesus turns the question from “**where**” to “**who**”. And notice especially the reference to the Father and worship of the Father in Spirit and in truth. **This comes back to the entire gospel of St. John which is to “reveal the Father through the Son”. Recall John 14:7 “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me”.**

And, the other question is **not “where” but “how”**. In Spirit and in truth.

There is one other gem or pearl in verse 23 and that is the fact that the Father is “**SEEKING** worshipers” the kind that worship him in spirit and in truth. We do not have to go on a pilgrimage, on a safari, on a quest -- no, the Father is seeking worshippers – so long as they worship in spirit and in truth. Just remember who he is talking to “Samaritan, immoral woman, God is seeking worshippers – all you need

to do is come to him – ask and worship from your heart – in spirit and in truth. Amazing. We cannot say, nor can we say of others “the sin that I have done, or the sin that you have done disqualifies you from the grace of God”.

Brings back the What’s So Amazing about Grace by Philip Yancy and I quote “When I pray for another person, I am praying for God to open my eyes so that I can see that person as God does, and then enter into the stream of love that God already directs toward that person.” This brings us again to the theme of “the others” and the call as to how we see “the others” no matter how we define them. May we sincerely pray a similar prayer.

The woman replies again, and you can almost hear the question in her statement in v 25 “I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.” Jesus responds with the clearest statement regarding who he is. He says simply “**I who speak to you am he**”. He has not made this statement before in his ministry – he has alluded to “being about my Father’s business” but, here he is clear. **He is the Christ, the Messiah.**

The disciples now return. This would be Act 2 – if this were a play.

Scene I. They come bustling into the well and we know their first question is “**what? You were talking with that woman?**”. But, they did not say it. Probably through her dress, they were making judgments in their minds about her immorality – they had not been part of the conversation and interaction between the woman and Jesus. They were not players or actors in Act 1.

Scene II. Notice the woman’s actions. She is gone, leaving her water jug behind. We can see her hurrying with this joyful news. She now has other priorities – never mind drinking water, she now knows about living water, eternal life.

The woman, given her status takes an interesting approach with the community – she does not say “I have met the Messiah” – they would have discounted her. Instead she describes a “man that told me what I have done -- and all the community also probably knew -- and then asks the question “could this be the Christ?”. **Well this question needed some examination and the crowd began to make their way to Jacob’s well.**

As Jesus, who has not eaten, refers to the fact that his strength comes from elsewhere – after all, he has just had a divinely inspired encounter. **As he sees the Samaritans coming from the town, he says “behold the fields, they are ripe unto harvest”. Remember – these are Samaritans.** He stayed there for 2 more days and many people believed. The townspeople make the point to the woman that they had seen the Messiah with their own eyes and were not relying on her statement.

Grace reaches out. Act 3 of the play

V42 ends the story expanding it even further – from Judea, to Samaria to the “whole world”. Look what it says “we know that this man really is the Savior of the world”.

The last book of the Bible, Revelation in chapter 22 refers to this river of life in verse 17 “The Spirit and the bride say “Come” And let him who hears say “Come!” whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life”.

It is this free gift that is offered. Accept it, take it, and receive eternal life. That is the gift of grace – not of works lest anyone should boast.

Let me end with reference to the work that MCC does in over 55 countries – many in the midst of turmoil, violence or suffering due to natural disasters.

Our mission is to share God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation.

We take seriously God’s call in Jesus’ parable of Matthew 25 verse 37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

May we overcome the barriers within our own society, in our churches, in our neighborhoods, in our country, and internationally, to share the good news of the Gospel so that all can drink of Living Water.

Pray for Eagle Ridge and our own individual responses.