

If You Only Knew John 4:5-15

INTRODUCTION

We don't know her name, yet she had the longest recorded conversation with Jesus in the entire Gospel of John. No, we don't know her name, but we do know a lot about her.

- She was a woman in a culture that devalued and demeaned all women.
- She was part of a race of people that were despised by the Jews of her day.
- She was a social outcast, especially in her own home community and among the people she knew best.
- She was unnamed, yes. But she is well known. We call her "the woman at the well."

Like many in our world today – perhaps like many of us gathered today – the circumstances of life weighed down on top of this woman. As a result she did what she had to do in order to get along ... to survive ... to make it to the next thing.

I read a story this week about an intense bootcamp experience for specialized military training. Part of the training was multi-day hike up a snow packed mountain. It required the soldiers to cross the whole mountain, bottom to top, through ten feet of snow with a large, heavy ruck sack on their backs and no other special equipment to help them along the way. That hike resulted in the highest dropout rate of any of the other intense experiences they faced in the entire program.

On the morning of the march, the drill instructor spoke to the soldiers. Here's what he said:

I guarantee you will want to quit. And when you do, look to the top of the mountain. And then look around for the closest tree and tell yourself, "I will make it to that next tree and then decide if I want to go on. And then when you get to that tree, find the next closest tree and do it again. If you will do that, tree by tree, you will find yourself at the top of the mountain."

The people I'm thinking about right now don't see mountaintops. They have a hard time even seeing the next tree. But that next tree is the only thing that keeps them going.

- A widow praying, "Lord help get through this next lonely night."
- A student hoping that the next exam will have a better result.
- A hungry person trying to make the groceries last until the next paycheck.
- A terminally ill patient fighting to make it through Christmas, or that next grandchild's birthday, or the next wedding anniversary.

This unnamed had no choice but to come to the well in the heat of the day.

So Jesus came to a town in Samaria called Sychar ... Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water...

Most people would be resting at that time. Most women would come early in the morning or late in the evening to collect water. But not her. This was her regular time.

- Everything about her story helps us to understand why she came when she did. She was avoiding the painful consequences of being there when other people were there too.
- You can even see that in her defensive and combative attitude in the conversation with Jesus.

In that conversation Jesus makes a statement that inspired this sermon. Look at verse 10:

"If you only knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10)

Imagine how different it would have been for her ... if she had only known...

- That God had created a divine appointment for her.
- That it was no coincidence that Jesus – and only Jesus – was there when she arrived. No disciples. No other townspeople. Just Jesus.
- That the answer to her shame, her identity, her pain was sitting there on the edge of Jacob's well, waiting for her to come.

Many people in this world carry their burdens around like jugs of water on their shoulders, totally unaware that Jesus is there – right before their very eyes. Some of those people hide those burdens and pains so well that no one else ever sees them. (It is like they come to the well when no one is there.)

How different life could be ... if they only knew.

This Lenten season you and I are trying to do what John the Baptist encouraged this people of his day to do when Jesus was present:

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

We want to sharpen our skills at recognizing when Jesus is present among us – and what that presence means in all its dimensions.

Now, I didn't read the whole story of the "Woman at the Well" this morning, but if I had you would have seen three different occasions in which Jesus revealed Himself to her.

First, He reveals Himself as the Living Water.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."
(John 4:10)

After asking the woman for a drink, He responds by offering her something far greater than water. She did not understand the symbolism, so she didn't "BEHOLD" Him.

Second, He revealed Himself as someone who could see below the façade she was presenting to Him.

"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." (John 4:17-18)

That caught her off guard and made her think Jesus was a prophet, like Elijah or Jeremiah. Closer, but still not right.

He was starting to get a little too close for her comfort, so to deflect the conversation she debating theology. Jesus had an answer for every question, so she tried to end the conversation once and for all.

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." (John 4:25-26)

And then it clicked. No more IF ONLY. Now she BEHELD Him. And everything changed.

Her story leads us to two applications.

APPLICATION #1: JESUS ALONE CAN FILL THE VOIDS IN OUR LIVES

This woman had looked for meaning and satisfaction in all the wrong places. She was thirsty and nothing quenched her thirst. Like the Psalmist when he cried out to God, she also could easily have said:

Earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

Every burden that we carry, every pain that we feel, every slight that has caused us to feel isolated from another person, needs to be given to Jesus.

And the Lord will satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones. And you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58:11)

APPLICATION #2: THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS EXTENDED TO EVERYONE

Jesus is not fazed by our sin, by our failures, by those things that cause us shame. His love is not dependent on the opinions of the rest of society.

He gently confronted this woman with her sin, yes, but He still loved her and made Himself known to her.

The epistle reading for today says it like this:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

APPLICATION

One of the great hymns of the faith proclaims the truth this unnamed woman discovered that day. It is a truth for all of us to claim as our own.

Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain—
Free to all, a healing stream—
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

Amen.