

## **Unlikely Openness**

### **John 4:1-42**

It's fun to meet together for worship outside and to be here at the park. This is a great location to give this sermon because it has to do with reaching our community. We're surrounded by the people of Amery this morning – and if you live here, it's the people you live among every day. Some of you live just a few blocks away. I live about a mile away. This is our community.

Do you realize that Jesus wants us to reach the people in this community? The people right here in the surrounding neighborhoods? Think of your neighbors and the people you drive by every day going to work, school, the grocery store. Some of them know Christ and have hope and a solid foundation in him. But many do not and we've been called to do our part to reach them and share Jesus with them. That's part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. That's part of our mission as a church. It's not just about us, it's about reaching the people around us that need Jesus.

Once you get that and see yourself living on mission in your community, you will probably begin to notice some reservations inside you that make you hesitate to share with others. There are probably certain people you don't feel comfortable sharing with. I'm guessing there are some you think would never want to hear what you have to say, so you don't even try. I feel like that with some people. Something about them makes me feel uncomfortable with talking about spiritual things and I assume they'd have no interest. I'm more open to share with those I think are more likely to listen.

We're going to see an awesome story this morning of a bunch of people who were very unlikely to listen to Jesus. I want us to see what he did and what happened to them so we can be encouraged to reach out into this community.

After Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, he and his disciples spent time in the Judean countryside outside of Jerusalem ministering, teaching, and baptizing people before heading back to Galilee. Normally, when Jews were traveling from Judea to Galilee, they would swing way to the east and actually detour across the Jordan River, go north for a ways, and then cross back over again once they

reached Galilee. But Jesus and his disciples took a different route and avoided the normal detour. I want us to see where they went and why they went there.

We are in the book of John again this morning, because it's the only gospel that records this story. After this we'll go back to Luke and stay there for most of this series.

Read John 4:1-6.

*Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), <sup>3</sup> he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. <sup>4</sup> And he had to pass through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

For 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans we don't think much about what we just read, but if you were a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew or Samaritan, you would probably do a double-take. "Jesus went where? Through Samaria?"

Samaria was the region in Israel between Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. It was inhabited by Samaritans. According to Bible.org, the history of the Samaritans went back 700 years before Christ when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria. Most of those Israelites were taken away into captivity, but some remained. The Assyrians then sent Gentile colonists from various pagan nations to resettle that land and they brought idols with them which the remaining Jews began to worship alongside the God of Israel. Intermarriages also took place, and the descendants became known as "Samaritans."

Conflict arose between these Samaritans and the Jews from the southern kingdom of Judah when the Jews returned to their land in about 500B.C. after being in exile in Babylon. The Samaritans angrily opposed their return to Jerusalem and tried to undermine their attempts to reestablish the nation, so that created animosity between the groups. In addition, the Jews detested the mixed marriages and corrupt worship of the Samaritans. So hatred and bitterness

developed on both sides and remained that way for hundreds of years leading up to Christ.

According to the Reformation Study Bible, the Jews during Jesus' time avoided Samaria: *"Jews and Samaritans felt profound contempt for each other. When traveling between Galilee and Judea, many Jews would cross the Jordan twice rather than pass through Samaria."* So the fact that Jesus and his disciples (who were all Jews) didn't do that is very surprising. Why go through Samaria? There was no way the wicked Samaritans would want anything to do with Jesus. Maybe he was just taking a shortcut to get home faster and wasn't planning to do any ministry. That proved to not be the case...

Read John 4:7-9.

*A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)*

This Samaritan woman was confused. She knew how strange it was that a Jewish man was in Samaria in the first place. She also knew how strange it was for him to ask her for a drink of water. According to the Reformation Study Bible the Jews had legislation that forbade a Jew to eat or drink with Samaritans, because they were more lax in their understanding of ritual cleanness. So the woman was probably confused because Jews would normally never ask a Samaritan to drink from one of their vessels.

But Jesus did. So not only did he enter Samaria, but he also asked for a drink out of a Samaritan pitcher. He didn't despise them like Jews normally did. And then he did something else that was out of the ordinary – he entered into a spiritual conversation with the woman. According to the Reformation Study Bible, in that culture, not only did Jews look down on Samaritans, but it was also normal for men to look down on women and consider it a waste of time to give instruction to a woman. But that's exactly what Jesus does next.

Read John 4:10-15.

*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.”<sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”*

Brushing aside the normal presuppositions and biases, Jesus took the opportunity to talk to the woman about salvation, eternal life, and spiritual things. He didn't let cultural barriers prevent him from reaching out to her. He took the subject that they were already talking about and steered it toward spiritual things, and she was actually interested. I think it would have been normal for Jews to assume she wouldn't be, but Jesus didn't make that assumption, and the woman was interested. She wanted to know more. The door was open, but now we see another barrier...

Read John 4:16-18.

*Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”*

Obviously, Jesus had some kind of supernatural knowledge of what was going on in the woman's life, and it wasn't good. He knew she was living with a man that wasn't her husband.

One of the details we saw earlier in this story is that the woman went to draw water from the well around noon. I've heard people observe that wasn't normal at all. Normally the women would draw water early in the morning, but this woman didn't. And it is understood that the reason she didn't was because of her lifestyle and circumstances. She likely felt shame because of her reputation around town. She didn't draw water with the other women because she was avoiding them. And Jesus knew what was going on.

That means that not only did Jesus step over the cultural biases that Jews had toward Samaritans and women, but he also stepped over the natural biases we feel toward those who are living an immoral lifestyle. We assume they won't be interested. So on paper, this woman would have been one of the most unlikely people to be interested in the gospel. And if you were a disciple of Christ at that time, called to reach people with the gospel, she would have been near the bottom of your list. We would naturally look past her and assume she'd never be interested.

But Jesus didn't. He continued to share the good news with her.

Read John 4:19-26.

*The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

Jesus didn't hold back. He told her the good news about who he was. He helped her to see and understand the will of the Father and the kind of worshippers he is seeking – not just Jews or Samaritans, but anyone who is born of the Spirit. He didn't let the assumption that she wouldn't listen keep him from sharing with her.

At that point his disciples caught up with him and the story continues...

Read John 4:27-30.

*Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" <sup>28</sup> So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" <sup>30</sup> They went out of the town and were coming to him.*

So all of a sudden, because Jesus was willing to reach out to the woman and share the good news with her, a whole city was hearing about him and heading out to meet him.

As that was happening, Jesus was back by the well talking with his disciples about how we should look at the people in our community. We have to see beyond our presuppositions and biases and look at people a different way...

Read John 4:31-38.

*Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."<sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."<sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."<sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.<sup>36</sup> Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.<sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'<sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."*

I don't know for sure, but I think Jesus was saying these things while they could see the people from Sychar approaching. "Don't look at them as Samaritans. Don't look at them as enemies. Don't see them as corrupt pagans who will never listen to what we have to say. Look at them as a field that God has prepared for a spiritual harvest and we have the opportunity to share in the joy of the harvest."

The last few verses show us what happened.

Read John 4:39-42.

*Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word.<sup>42</sup> 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 indeed the Savior of the world."*

Amazing. No miracles. No signs and wonders. Just the good news. And they believed. I'm sure the disciples were bewildered.

I can't help but see the contrast between this and what we saw last week when Jesus was in Jerusalem. There, he was rejected by the people that should have embraced him... and here he was embraced by the people that should have rejected him. I think we need to see that this morning: *He was rejected by the people that should have embraced him... and embraced by the people that should have rejected him.*

What does that do to our assumptions, presuppositions, and biases? It throws them out the window.

What if Jesus would have avoided Samaria and the woman at the well? What if he would have done what Jews normally did and took the detour around? Jesus was different and looked at people differently. He didn't see all the presuppositions and biases; he saw fields ready for harvest...

Who do you see in the people in our community? Who are the Samaritans in your life? What if the people you naturally avoid are actually the people who are most ready to hear the gospel?

This passage has been a good reminder to me to pray for the people in our community and look at them differently – We are sitting in the middle of a field and the Holy Spirit is working. In whom is he working? Maybe it's in the people we least expect and God wants us to look at them differently. God is preparing a harvest and we will have the joy of sharing in that harvest. May the Holy Spirit stir our hearts and give us the courage to share.

**Pray.**

**Benediction: Philippians 1:9-11**