

July 7, 2024

“Proclaiming the Lord”

John 4:1-30, 39-42

FCF: “Evangelism” as a cause of discomfort

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Samaritan woman is a model evangelist.

(magnet) We need to follow her example.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Some words make everyone nervous and become unmentionable. For instance, “bomb” in airport security. “Voldemort” at Hogwarts. “Split” in a church parking lot. And “evangelism” amidst polite company. The word (and all that is associated with it) has a way of making folks feel nervous. Non-Christians can feel treated as an object and offended. Christians often feel obligated but still unsettled. To both groups, I want to say that it really need not be that way.

We are pressing on in our summer sermon series, “Jesus and the Daughters of Eve.” We are looking at interactions between Jesus and the women around Him and the lessons we can learn. This morning, we are looking at Jesus’ conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 4:1-30, 39-42](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Some of you may know that baseball great Willie Mays passed away last month. He was 93. His statistical accomplishments were staggering. But he is mostly remembered as a magical player who loved the spotlight and had a mile-wide smile. He was one who loved playing the game. He was the “Say Hey Kid,” his iconic over-the-shoulder catch in the 1954 World Series is still known as “the Catch.” Some suggested that Mays even purposely broke late on some balls to make the catches more spectacular. He was an entertainer with star power who stood out.

Here in John 4, we have a woman who stood out. How so? This is Jesus’ longest recorded conversation with anyone in the Gospels. This woman is the first person in John’s Gospel to whom Jesus explicitly reveals Himself as the Christ. And He does so by making a shocking claim ([READ John 4:26](#)). Literally, “I am, the one speaking to you.” This is a lesser known “I am” statement. And it is made to her, an outcast at a well. My friends, she stands out.

John is drawing attention to her here. How so? He is portraying her to us as a model evangelist. The Samaritan woman is a model evangelist. And we need to follow her example.

What would it look like for us to follow her example, to see her as a model evangelist? It would mean noting two things. First, what she experienced. And, second, what she proclaimed.

I. WHAT SHE EXPERIENCED

Let’s start with what she experienced. We see this as the conversation progressed.

A) *Unfolding Understanding*

We see her understanding unfolding. She has a growing appreciation of Jesus.

1. A Jewish man

She starts in v. 9 with seeing Him as but a Jewish man, just another traveller from the other side.

2. Greater than Jacob

That progresses to v.12 when, as He speaks of somehow being able to provide living water, she begins to entertain the possibility He could somehow be greater than Jacob, one of the patriarchs.

3. A prophet

As we get to v.19, she realizes that He is a prophet. It's the only way He could have such insight.

4. Messiah

And by the time we come to v.29, she is proclaiming this man to be the Christ. She returns to her village, cautiously claiming Him to be the long awaited King. Cautious, but without any doubt.

B) Surprising Compassion

That unfolding understanding is connected to a surprising compassion that Jesus shows.

1. Intentionally sought

He intentionally sought her. (READ John 4:4) Geographically, that's true. But the normal route to and from Judea and Galilee was to bypass Samaria. This is not convenience but compulsion.

2. Barriers ignored

Jesus intentionally sought her. And ignored all the barriers. There are four here. The racial barrier - historically, the Samaritans were seen as a mixed race. The religious barrier - they had assimilated pagan worship practices, accepted only the first five books of the OT, and had even built their own temple. The gender barrier - rabbis did not have women as disciples. They weren't allowed as witnesses in a court. They were considered irrational and untrustworthy. Finally there was the sin barrier - divorce was easy for men. The woman was always at fault. So she would be despised in her village. Seen as available by the men and a threat by their wives.

3. Humility and respect

Yet Jesus treats her with humility and respect. He asks her for help, a cup of water. He carries on a conversation with extraordinary depth, truly taking both her and her questions seriously.

4. Gentleness and grace

And, even as Jesus brings up her sin, He does so with such care, such gentleness and grace.

How did this land on her? We don't have to wonder (READ John 4:28a). Her whole purpose in coming to the well had been forgotten. Why? Because of who she had experienced.

Application:

There are several directions we could go here in terms of application. We could talk about the ways we have the responsibility to engage with others in the same way we see here. And that would be true. But rather than our responsibility, I want to focus on a reflection. How has Jesus moved towards you? How has He shown there is no barrier that will keep Him from you - not who you are, not what you've done, not how confused you've been? See how gladly He treats you with more humility and respect, gentleness and grace, than you can ever imagine.

What this woman experienced is what every follower of Jesus experiences.

II. WHAT SHE PROCLAIMED

And what she experienced flows into what she proclaimed ([READ John 4:28-29](#)).

A) *Transparency with Her Past*

What did she proclaim? Note the transparency she shows with her past. She brings it up.

1. Unexpected

“All that I ever did.” All the traumatic pain. All the foolish choices. Whatever was done to her, she had done some things herself. And she isn’t hiding or blame-shifting. That’s not expected.

2. Effect

And the effect on the townspeople was to get their attention. “Anything else she might have said we would likely have ignored. But something has happened with her.” ([READ John 4:30](#))

B) *Attention upon Jesus*

There’s this transparency. And then the attention, the focus, put solely upon Jesus.

1. Unexpected

This too is unexpected. Think of how often with such stories of rescue, the emphasis is on the pit, the depths, the struggle, the mess, the sinner. Where is her emphasis? ([READ John 4:29](#)).

2. Effect

That emphasis has an effect. It gets their attention. Something has radically changed in this woman. They can see that. And the Spirit is evidently working in their hearts. All the more so because she is getting out of the way. Which then beautifully leads to this ([READ John 4:42](#)).

She is indeed the model evangelist. All because of what and who she proclaims.

Application:

Where then are we to go with this? Whatever else you have heard about evangelism, the sharing of the good news, it is not meant to be complicated. We are simply to tell our story of what Jesus has done. “I once was lost but now am found. I was blind but now I see. And the difference was Jesus.” Pulling no punches. Hiding no facts. And we see it here by this well.

Jesus holds before us this woman as a model evangelist. We need to follow her example.

CONCLUSION:

She left her jar and went into town. They went out to Jesus and came to believe in Him. The dynamics of this remind me of a quote from Bruce Milne in his commentary ([READ](#)), “There are no more attractive evangelists than those who have newly discovered Jesus.” Which has a ring of truth to it but begs a question. What about the rest of us? Is there little use then for us after the sheen of conversion has worn off? Not necessarily. It doesn’t have to be that way.

It’s a matter of fuel. That is one of the key obstacles NASA is facing as it considers interstellar travel. It’s one of the core problems car manufacturers are facing as they try to make electric vehicles reliable, practical, and affordable. What we see here in John 4 is the ultimate renewable energy source. What she experienced fueled, flowed in and drove all she proclaimed.

Which gets us back to our question. Those who are continually discovering Jesus, who are regularly encountering the risen Christ through His Spirit, can be just as potent as any new believer. And more. How? We breathe out what we breathe in. And who. Time with Jesus in the Word and prayer, not just study but in meditation - just as we see in the Scriptures themselves.

That is a means of grace. Just as we have here this morning with the Lord's Supper...

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