

When Necessary: Be Gentle

Sermon 3-26-17

John 4:1-26

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”²—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—³he left Judea and started back to Galilee.

⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus 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.” ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Message:

To start today's message, I'll be reading a story from Bill Hybel's book, *Just Walk Across the Room*. "I was in a coffee shop recently to grab some fuel before a string of afternoon meetings. I'd looked forward to stopping by because the owner was typically there, and he and I had been building rapport over several months. As I walked in and scanned the crowd, I tried to catch sight of him. As was always the case in this particular shop, the service that day was flawless. When it was my turn in line, I ordered the usual and stepped aside, eyes still darting past the anonymous faces. I turned around to leave and saw the owner approaching me, customary smile on his face. We greeted each other as I pulled him aside to get us out of the flow of the crowd. Drawing on the experience I'd just had, I asked, 'how do you train your employees to be as good as they are? They are always so courteous, well trained, and enthusiastic! How do you do it?' The question was nothing profound, but his response led to an open door for further conversation. I probably could have asked him anything under the sun and he would have engaged—that's the nature of divine interactions. And who knows what types of conversations the Holy Spirit will prompt us to have in the future...my role is not to determine the outcome. My role is to step out in faith, start a conversation, ask a question, explore whether there is an open door. And to leave the rest up to God." As Bill noted, there is nothing earth-shattering that happened because of this one encounter with this coffee shop owner. It's not like because Bill took an interest, that it was a direct line to this owner falling on his knees and receiving salvation right in the middle of the coffee shop. While God is certainly capable of doing such things, my experience and Bill's experience tells me that more often than not the experience and path to know Jesus is much gentler. Bill just asked a simple question that attempted to make a connection with this owner.

We see this gentle approach with Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. Starting in verse 5, "...he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus 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." All Jesus said was, "Give me a drink" and it led eventually to talking about "living water."

But this statement crossed more boundaries than we probably realize reading this in the 21st century. There is a long history between Samaritans and Jews.

According to Gail R. O'Day, the tension between the two groups goes as far back as 721 BCE during the Assyrian occupation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The intensity of this conflict picked up in about 200 BCE when the Samaritans built a shrine on a mountain and claimed that this is where people are to worship instead of at the Temple. In 128 BCE Jewish troops destroyed the Samaritans shrine and the conflict continued. So Jewish people in Samaria are already crossing a boundary.

And for Jesus to speak to this woman is crossing even more boundaries. One, Jewish men did not initiate conversation with an unknown woman. Two, Jewish teachers did not engage in public conversation with a woman. Three, Jews did not invite contact with Samaritans. Fourth, typically when men went to the well, they were looking for a bride. So you can see why this woman would react to Jesus with such amazement. He is doing things that he should not be doing. By telling her, "Give me a drink" He entered uncommon and unknown territory. He is engaging in social conversation that should not be happening. He is breaking boundaries.

So much of witnessing is the willingness to bridge schisms. To break barriers. To go into unexpected places. To engage in conversation with someone who may be different. One of the important lessons that I've learned over the years is that I can't become so 'spiritual' to the point where I lose my humanity. Now that doesn't mean I engage in 'sinfulness,' but if I don't stay grounded in the things that everyday people engage in, how can I ever be a witness? How can I connect relationally? So much of witnessing is about finding connection. Finding commonality. So if I bury my head in the church world, how can I connect with someone in the business world? I can be the holiest person in the world. Or I can put on the appearance that I am extremely righteous, but that just makes me different and untouchable. Not relational. It's part of the reason I don't like our language of "Christian" and "Secular." We use the term "secular" with disdain. "Those secular people need to know Jesus." It sets up this false dichotomy of Christian people versus Secular people. Or insiders versus outsiders. Our aim is not to become isolated or sectarian. Removing ourselves from the world. If Christ is in us, shouldn't our aim be to bring heaven to earth? God wants to join us. Not for us to escape this world. Our aim is for all to know the love of Jesus. And we probably have more in common with those "secular" people if we give it a chance. And by finding that commonality, we break the barrier that once existed. And we find a gentle way to share the love of Jesus. Jesus didn't authoritatively show His holiness and might in this scene. He didn't pronounce this woman a sinner and call her to repent before she goes to hell. Jesus started with commonality: water. And look where it led.

Starting in verse 11, ¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus was simply thirsty and the conversation organically moved into drinking the living water of Christ. It almost seems unintentional. Like Jesus stumbled across this. Or that Jesus just simply took advantage of this wonderful opportunity that presented itself to share His life with this woman.

Imagine if Jesus would have led the entire conversation with this line starting in verse 16, ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” I can almost guarantee that if Jesus started with this line, He would have surely maintained the boundary between He and this Samaritan woman. He would have cut-off any opportunity to share His good news. But instead He gently and slowly gets to this part. And Jesus shows her His power and knowledge. Just a quick note, many of us may assume that this woman having multiple husbands is her actively sinning in promiscuity. But its just as possible that this woman was following the customary Levirate system. Meaning that when her first husband died, it was the duty of the brother of that husband to take her as his wife. Making him her second husband. And so on and so on until the fifth husband. So she may not have been sinning as some have assumed. And this may not be Jesus confronting her “sin” but simply revealing His all-knowing power. Because by showing her His all-knowing power it leads to the next section.

Starting in verse 19, ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” Ah-ha! Jesus

reveals himself to her. But again, that wasn't His first move. Imagine that you would go up to every person you see in the supermarket and say, "Do you know Jesus?" "Do you know Jesus?" "Do you know Jesus?" Can you imagine how off-putting that would be? People need to be gently led to the living water of Jesus Christ.

One such example of this gentle way comes from a Washington Post letter by Deborah Greene, "Dear Strangers, I remember you. Ten months ago, when my cellphone rang with news of my father's suicide, you were walking into Whole Foods prepared to do your grocery shopping, just as I had been only minutes before you. But I had already abandoned my cart full of groceries and I stood in the entryway of the store. My brother was on the other end of the line. He was telling me my father was dead, that he had taken his own life early that morning and through his own sobs, I remember my brother kept saying, "I'm sorry, Deborah, I'm so sorry." I can't imagine how it must have felt for him to make that call. After I hung up, I started to cry and scream as my whole body trembled. This just couldn't be true. It couldn't be happening. Only moments before, I had been going about my errands on a normal Monday morning. Only moments before, my life had felt intact. Overwhelmed with emotions, I fell to the floor, my knees buckling under the weight of what I had just learned. And you, kind strangers, you were there. You could have kept on walking, ignoring my cries, but you didn't. You could have simply stopped and stared at my primal display of pain, but you didn't. No, instead you surrounded me as I yelled through my sobs, "My father killed himself. He killed himself. He's dead." And the question that has plagued me since that moment came to my lips in a scream, "Why?" I must have asked it over and over and over again. I remember in that haze of emotions, one of you asked for my phone and who you should call. What was my password? You needed my husband's name as you searched through my contacts. I remember that I could hear your words as you tried to reach my husband for me, leaving an urgent message for him to call me. I recall hearing you discuss among yourselves who would drive me home in my car and who would follow that person to bring them back to the store. You didn't even know one another, but it didn't seem to matter. You encountered me, a stranger, in the worst moment of my life and you coalesced around me with common purpose, to help. I remember one of you asking if you could pray for me and for my father. I must have said yes, and I recall now that Christian prayer being offered up to Jesus for my Jewish father and me, and it still both brings tears to my eyes and makes me smile. In my fog, I told you that I had a friend, Pam, who worked at Whole Foods and one of you went in search of her and, thankfully, she was there that morning and you brought her to me. I remember the relief I felt at seeing her face, familiar and warm. She took me to the back, comforting and caring for me so lovingly until my husband could get to me. And I even recall as I sat

with her, one of you sent back a gift card to Whole Foods; though you didn't know me, you wanted to offer a little something to let me know that you would be thinking of me and holding me and my family in your thoughts and prayers. That gift card helped to feed my family, when the idea of cooking was so far beyond my emotional reach. I never saw you after that. But I know this to be true, if it were not for all of you, I might have simply gotten in the car and tried to drive myself home. I wasn't thinking straight, if I was thinking at all. If it were not for you, I don't know what I would have done in those first raw moments of overwhelming shock, anguish and grief. But I thank God every day that I didn't have to find out. Your kindness, your compassion, your willingness to help a stranger in need have stayed with me until this day. And no matter how many times my mind takes me back to that horrible life altering moment, it is not all darkness. Because you reached out to help, you offered a ray of light in the bleakest moment I've ever endured. You may not remember it. You may not remember me. But I will never, ever forget you. And though you may never know it, I give thanks for your presence and humanity, each and every day." When we lead with the compassion and gentleness of Jesus, the impact is exponential. We break barriers. We cross divides. We build bridges into the life of another. And because Jesus gently drew this Samaritan woman to the living water, after our passage, the Samaritan woman brings all her friends. And all of them came to know salvation in Christ. The impact is indeed exponential if we respond faithfully to the Holy Spirit.

Imagine with me what life would be like if we leave this building today knowing that Jesus believes we can do this. That by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can witness to those around us of Jesus' good news of salvation. Imagine with me that you walk out of here and you change some of your environments to encounter a totally different sub-culture that doesn't know Jesus. That you become the light of Christ in a dark place. Imagine with me that when you walk out of here, in those new environments, you start listen and hear the movement of the Holy Spirit. That you hear the Spirit prompt to help someone in need. And that in that small act, a seed is planted or you reap the opportunity to lead them to Jesus. Imagine with me that when you risk compassion. That when you risk asking a question. That when you risk making the effort to find common ground. You open up the door to a relationship that leads another to Christ. You can do this! Change your environment! Be spontaneous! Be gentle! "Share the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words." What could happen if we, the people of God, Christ in us, would spread the good news of Jesus Christ? Hope would be found. Light would shine. Freedom would reign. Love would fill hearts. And Christ would reign. To close, watch this video. (Play Video at <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/56427/it-starts-with-an-invitation>)