

Transformed by knowing Jesus: Samaritan woman at the well

Message for Sunday, May 14, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 4:4-42

Introduce the Bible reading

Two weeks ago, we heard the apostle John tell how Jesus transformed his life. Let's recall what John had to say about Samaritans, the people who live in the region called Samaria:

People who live there are called Samaritans, and they are a wicked people. They claim to worship the Lord God, but they're fakes. We Jews have nothing to do with them. So to get to Jerusalem, we usually cross the Jordan River and walk on the other side, just so we don't have to pollute ourselves by getting near those filthy people. It adds another day to the journey, but it's worth it.

Children's Message:

I'm looking for volunteers to help me with a special project this afternoon. We are going to drive around the area and cut down all the apples trees we can find. Then we are going to go to all the grocery stores and make them throw out all the apples they have for sale. It's really important that we do this today, before things get even worse.

You look a little puzzled. Let me explain. This morning I wanted to have an apple with breakfast. You know what I discovered? Apples are rotten. Look at this! *Hold up my apple so they can see the brown rotten part on the inside.* I was eating this, and bit into that part. Disgusting!

So I can tell you from my own personal experience that apples are rotten. We need to get rid of them before the same thing happens to other people.

What?! You don't agree with me? *Let the children tell what they think of my wonderful idea.*

So you're saying—let me see if I understand you correctly—that just because one apple is bad, it

doesn't mean that all apples are bad. Have I got that right?

Now that I stop think about it, I think you have a good point. Actually, it would be pretty foolish to say that every apple is bad just because of one.

But I'm wondering... if we don't do that with apples, why do we sometimes do it with people? That's what was going on in the Bible passage we just heard. Jesus was visiting people who are called Samaritans. The Samaritans thought that all Jews (like Jesus) were rotten, and Jews believed the same thing about Samaritans. But not Jesus! He met a Samaritan woman at the well, and they had a really good conversation. They became friends.

I think Jesus would like us to treat all people like he did: see the good in them.

Idea from Harvey and Patsie Moore, in *The Mysterious Marvelous Snowflake*.

Message "Transformed by knowing Jesus:
Samaritan woman at the well"¹

For most women, coming to the well to draw water was a highlight for the day. Their friends and neighbours were all there. While they were waiting for their turn to let down the bucket into the deep well, the children played, and they got to visit with one another. They came twice a day: early in the morning, while the air was still cool from the night; and in the evening, after the sun has gone down.

I was different. I trudged along the dusty path at noon, my eyes squinting against the blazing sun overhead. I kept my eyes down for another reason, though—so I wouldn't see the stares of the others in the village. But I couldn't close my ears:

"Have you heard? She's got a new man!"

"They say she'll sleep with anyone."

"Shhh. Here I comes now."

I went to the well at noon because I knew I would be alone.

¹ The core of this message comes from Max Lucado, a wonderful storyteller and preacher in San Antonio, Texas. It's from his book, *Six Hours One Friday*.

I'm a Samaritan, so I knew the sting of racism. I'm a woman, so I felt the burden of sexism. Plus I'd been married to five men. Five different beds. Five different rejections. I knew the sound of slamming doors.

I knew what it meant to love and receive no love in return. My current mate wouldn't even give my a ring—why bother, when he'd only want it back when he's finished with me, too?

Some people go through life hurting, not so much from physical suffering as from the coldness of others. Life seems worthless, meaningless when there is no joy, no light. Believe me, I've been there.

So I came to the well at noon. I expected silence. I expected solitude. Instead, I found someone who knew me better than I knew myself.

He was seated on the ground: legs outstretched, hands folded, back resting against the well. His eyes were closed. I stopped and looked at him. I looked around. No one else was near. I looked back at him. I could tell by his clothing that he was Jewish. What's he doing here? Then his eyes opened, and I quickly looked away, embarrassed. I went briskly about my task of drawing water from the well.

As I brought the bucket up, he spoke to me, "Can I have a drink?"

I thought, "Yeah, right! As if that's all he wants. He's just like all the others. And he's Jewish to boot." So I said to him, "Since when does one of your kind ask a woman like me for a drink?" It turns out I was right—well, partly right. He was after more than a drink of water. He was after my heart. Let me describe what happened, so you'll understand.

We started talking. We talked about—of all things—water. But here's the thing: he talked to me as if I had a brain in my head. He was actually interested in me, not just my chest. What I mean is, he treated me with respect.

He told me about a spring of water—living water, he called it—that would quench my deepest thirst. That intrigued me. "Sir, give me this water so that I

won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He replied, "Go, call your husband and come back." I just about died. Here was a Jew who didn't care if I was a Samaritan. Here was a man who didn't look down on me as a woman. Here was the closest thing to gentleness I'd ever experienced. And now he was asking me about my intimate relations.

I thought about lying: "Oh, my husband? He's away right now." Maybe I should try to change the subject. Part of me wanted the earth to swallow me up. But instead of running away, I did something I never expected; I told the truth. "I have no husband."

He replied, "You're right. You've had five husbands, and you're not married to the man you're living with now." Wha—! How did he know?! Even more, I waited for what would come next: the rebuke, the lecture on the mess I'm making of my life. But it didn't come. There was no criticism. No anger. Just a plain statement of the facts.

I answered, "I can see that you are a prophet." God must have somehow shown him my secrets. Clearly, there is something special about this man. He has a relationship with God like no one else. So I continued.

"Where is God? My people say that he is on this mountain. You Jews say that he is in Jerusalem. I don't know where he is."

His eyes lit up when I asked that. He grinned at me—no, not the smug kind of smile that says, "I'm better than you." It was a smile of genuine warmth. I could tell this was his favourite topic to talk about. He started telling me about God. And get this—he called God "Father." Like he had a personal connection with God.

I said that God is really hard to understand; but when the Messiah—God's Saviour—comes, he will make everything clear.

He answered, "You're looking for the Messiah. I am the Messiah."

I was stunned. I stared. I stammered. My mouth was open, but no words came out. I couldn't believe it; there's no way it could be true... But suddenly everything made sense. It *is* true! And I'm talking with him!

This is amazing! This is wonderful! I have to tell others, so they can come and meet him, too. I ran back into town, excited, thrilled, my eyes shining. I didn't care what others thought about me. This man—the Messiah—accepted me just as I was. That's all that mattered.

I forgot all about my water jar and ran back into the village. I told people, "I just met the Messiah! He knows all about me—I mean *everything*—and he still respects me and loves me. You've got to come and meet him yourself!"

Back to Bruce now

Can you picture yourself in this story? Can you see yourself talking with Jesus, and he knows all about you—and I mean *everything*. You squirm, embarrassed, ashamed, afraid of what he thinks about you. And now hear Jesus say, "I love you, just the way you are."

That's what grace is. Once you've experienced God's grace, your life is not the same. Instead of guilt, you have confidence. Not self-confidence, mind you! You have a relationship with God: he loves you, and you love him, too.

Next Steps:

- Be real with God. Don't pretend to be something you're not. Discover that God still loves you. Wow!
- Share that discovery with someone else, someone who doesn't know God's amazing love.
- Be willing to step outside your comfort zone. You can be the welcome to a stranger.