

**David's sermon – 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020**  
**The Samaritan woman – John 4:5-42**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen

Today we're going to look at the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob's Well.

First of all we need to realise that back in Jesus day, being a woman wasn't up to much, as you were considered property rather than a person, and being a Samaritan into the bargain was a double whammy really because they were really hated by their fellow Jews.

The northern kingdom of the Jews was invaded by the Assyrians around 720 BC and they carried off most of the population back to Media as slaves. They then brought in other people and cultures to take their place and the Jews who were left behind began to inter-marry with the immigrants. By doing this they committed, what was to strict Jews, a terrible crime of losing their racial purity.

And most of the Samaritan population who were carried off to Media never came back but simply accepted their lot and got on with life living in a foreign land. They are actually known as the ten lost tribes.

By contrast, when the southern kingdom was invaded and its people carried off to Babylon, they refused to inter-marry and worship local gods, remaining racially pure and eventually returning to Jerusalem.

That's really when the trouble began, around 450BC, when the southern Jews refused the help of the Samaritans in rebuilding the temple, because of the loss of their Jewish heritage. So the Southern Jew's hatred of their northern Samaritan brethren goes back a long way.

But Jesus uses this animosity to great effect on two occasions doesn't he? Here in this story about meeting the woman at the well, and of course the other famous story of the Good Samaritan.

It's not generally known but I'm actually married to a Samaritan woman. For many years Pam was a member of the Samaritan's counselling service and in fact ran the Samaritan's training team. It's interesting isn't it that today we should give the name Samaritans to an organisation dedicated to helping people in distress. Chosen quite deliberately of course from the story of the Good Samaritan

I haven't found it too bad being married to a Samaritan but in Jesus day things would have been very different. I'd like us just for a moment to picture the scene.

It's a hot, dusty day and Jesus is weary from his long walk. So he sits down at the side of the famous Jacob's Well.

I guarantee you that from now on, every time you pass that pub on the road to Holmfirth you'll always think of Jesus on a hot summer's day

A Samaritan woman comes along to get some water and Jesus asks her for a drink. They strike up a conversation. It seems like any typical daily encounter. People going about their business, passing the time of day with each other, gossiping around the village pump.

As you picture the scene, think of those puzzles you sometimes find in magazines which ask what is wrong with the picture.

They might show someone trying to fix a computer with a sledgehammer or sawing off the branch of a tree they are sitting on.

As we imagine Jesus sitting at the well with the Samaritan woman we need to consider that same question 'What's wrong with this picture?' because what follows in the story only makes sense if we do.

Here we have Jesus, a holy man, sitting alone talking to a woman, when in the culture of his day such a thing was absolutely forbidden. If it was unavoidable that a man should find himself alone with a woman, he most certainly wouldn't have spoken to her. The risk of impurity, the risk of gossip, the risk of being drawn into immorality was far too high. Even Jesus' disciples are appalled by his actions.

And then of course we have the issue of the woman being a Samaritan. The Jews would have nothing to do with them and they most certainly wouldn't share a drinking cup with one.

Thirdly the woman seems to be of dubious reputation. Women would normally visit a well at dawn or dusk when it's much cooler. But this woman has come when she's least likely to meet anyone else. Especially someone who might know her and know the kind of person she is.

And despite all this Jesus starts up a conversation with her. This passage ends with Jesus telling her *she* should actually have asked *him* for a drink and then he would have given her *living water*.

So what 'good news' message does the Samaritan woman bring?

Well in the same way as with the Samaritan woman in the story, *our* encounters with Jesus can be by chance, unexpected, in the most unlikely places. Jesus can pop into our lives when we're least expecting him. He truly is a God of surprises.

Secondly, Jesus shows us that the chosen people aren't just the Jews — but everyone, and not just everyone — but especially the outcasts and those shunned by the rest of society. Those who feel unworthy, low self-esteem, sinners, strugglers, the weak, the vulnerable, the poor, ordinary human beings like you and me — alleluia ! Hidden within this rustic scene, a profound message that Jesus came to save us all. Every single one of us. But more than that Jesus shows us that he can and will replace our 'stagnant water' in the well, our stagnant lives caught up in the cares of the world, and he will replace it with his refreshing living water which will cleanse us and fill us with new life.

Jesus knows all about this woman and her history and he lets her know that he knows. Yet despite her sordid past he talks to her and reveals who he is. He isn't put off by her past, he isn't put off by convention. In fact it's because of who she is that he loiters by the well. He can see a woman in need of healing and he knows that he's the man for the job. In this one simple act of kindness, simply taking the time and trouble in the heat of the day to treat her with compassion and humanity, he creates a new follower. Immediately she runs back to her village to tell everyone she's seen the Messiah. So excited and enthusiastic is she that the whole village runs after her, back to the Well to see Jesus for themselves and to hear his word. And we're told that many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony,

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there for 2 days. And many more believed because of his word.

From that brief encounter by the well, Jesus has the power to transform this woman from an outcast into a disciple. And the Samaritan woman is defined not by what happens to her, but by her response. She immediately employs that same power to enthuse the whole of her village.

We've all, in one way or another, been transformed by that same living water. In the same way we all have the power to pass on that living water to others, transforming their lives too. In fact I'm certain we have all done so in some form or another, in one way or another.

I hope that we can use this strange period of lockdown to recharge our batteries, refresh our sometimes weary spirits and enable us to sit at the well with Jesus. And so allow him to re-fill us with his living water. Amen