

Hurst Green
15th Mar 20
The woman at the well
John 4: 1-42

We are looking at stops on Jesus' route to Jerusalem, Good Friday and Easter Sunday and last week we looked at a different slant on the transfiguration which I think showed a different part of to the three disciples rather than our view that he changed.

This week I have decided to take a stop in Samaria and the woman at the well.

Don't go to sleep. I know it is a familiar story and you have probably heard many sermons on it during your time as a Christian but there are always lessons to be learnt and I hope I have been given the right words for you today.

That is one of the amazing things about preaching. Everyone hears the same words but through the Holy Spirit in you each of you can take away a different meaning because God has a different lesson for each of you. Many years ago I learnt that even in a poor sermon God can still talk to you as an individual.

So pay attention to the Holy Spirit and see what God has for you today!!

Now if you read around about the Samaritan woman you will quickly find that it is a text that can be read in many different ways each of which can teach us something for today.

Isn't that another great thing about the bible – the way the same set of verses can teach you different things and different times of your life.

I certainly have experienced this in several ways:

- Sometimes different meanings for things – particularly the prophecies.
- Sometimes God seems to have slipped in a new verse that I have not noticed before.
- And sometimes whole passages can have different meanings as you read them in different ways.

We had an excellent example of that on Thursday looking at Matthew 24 where it uses the phrase “all peoples of the earth” which can be read in different ways:

- It could mean everyone (which is how I have tended to read it)
- Or it could mean all the people that belong to the earth meaning those people who have chosen the earth rather than heaven.

Interesting!

And our text today can be read in several ways but I am going to offer you two of them. A simpler more traditional view and a more profound view.

But first some **history and social mores** that you need to understand to get the most out of this text.

Samaria was North of Jerusalem and sat between Judea in the south and Galilee in the North.

When Israel was sent into exile the Babylonians did their normal thing of bringing some people from another country and settling them on this land. Being taken over by the Babylonians was a dangerous thing – you would probably lose everything and then get settled in a new land where you had to start from scratch.

This was done to reduce the risk of rebellion as the people groups were mixed up and national identities were lost.

This was true for Samaria where different cultures and religions had been brought in and the Jews who returned from exile looked down on them as a mongrel people who had a different culture and worshipped a variety of Gods.

So Samaria had had to great its own temple because they were not allowed to use the new temple that had been built in Jerusalem.

The Jews would have nothing to do with Samaria and Samaritans and to get from Judea to Galilee some would cross the Jordan and go up the west bank and then come East across the Jordan into Galilee.

And on the social side men and women ran very different lives. Their roles were laid down clearly and the two sexes only met in certain ways. You can still experience the same thing in some places in Africa where the men of the house occupy the front rooms and the women have the kitchen. A friend married a Fijian who was in the Army over here and was taken to Fiji to meet his family. She was outraged when she arrive and as a member of the family was taken to the kitchen while her husband sat in the front room with the men!

This split led to certain traditions as the women did things together and one of those things was drawing water. This was quite clearly women's work and they would do it together in the morning and in the evening when it was sooler.

So we will come back to those points as we go through these two views.

Starting with the traditional.

Now remember that this is the longest recorded conversation anyone ever had with Jesus. His teachings are longer but this is the longest conversation.

Jesus was upsetting the Pharisees again. This time by the disciples he was gaining and so he decided to go back up to Galilee. The Bible says

John 4:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *Now he had to go through Samaria.*

Now physically he did not have to go through Samaria – he could, or the Jews would say, should have gone the longer route around Samaria.

But he had to go through Samaria because he had to be at Sychar to have this conversation. That had to is a spiritual “had to” because he had to do the Fathers work.

As it says in the next Chapter in a great passage on “Life through the Son.”

John 5:19 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

And this is what we are seeking to become. A people (individually and together) who sees the Fathers work and who gets on and does it. We are being transformed to do the good works God has laid before us!!

Now we are at the sixth hour, that is noon to you and I, and the Sun is high in the sky and it is hot and Jesus gets to the well.

Now look at verse 6. Jesus was tired. Jesus is human and gets tired and one of the reasons this is mentioned is to encourage you. There are times when you are tired and yet there still is some good work for you to be done. Jesus is about to bring most of a town to God and he must have this conversation and meet with the Samaritans before he gets invited to stay for two days and so gets some rest.

Now this approach splits this story into five parts and I will be brief about them so that we can get to lunch before it turns into a late dinner sometime this evening!

The first part is **making contact** in verses 1-8

This is the bit about doing the will of the Father and tells us some things about our own Evangelistic efforts.

While some of it is about our neighbours and our friends that is only part of it.

It also requires us to go to places where it might not be comfortable and might even be difficult.

Like here where Jesus earned more condemnation from the Jewish Establishment for breaking their social mores which had turned into rules for no particular reason.

Where are we being challenged to break social mores to go to people?

Because we often talk of reaching people but actually there are many that you will have to go to.

Then of course it was unusual that this woman came on her own and at noon. Perhaps she was ostracized because of her social situation? We don't know but it is interesting that Jesus starts converting this town with this woman and not some ranking official down in the town itself.

Are you called to make contact with someone like this? Someone who doesn't fit in or is on the outside of the society for anyone of a number of reasons. Listen to the Spirit within you rather than do things the way you think best.

And Jesus finds this woman with a simple question

John 4:7 (ANIV)

^z~~When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"~~

You don't need some great theological statement to start a conversation or some great spiritual challenge (although those work as well). The important thing is to start that conversation.

Then following **making contact** is the **Challenge** in verses 9-15.

And I am sorry but this is a necessary part of evangelising people. It's the part we don't like preferring to go for letting them see Jesus in how we live so that we do not have to do anything but you are called to do something.

So these verses are full of things that were not stand for that day, age and culture.

- A Jew speaks to a Samaritan
- A man speaks to a woman he does not know.
- A Jew would drink from a Samaritan cup.

So what cultural norms are you called to break to get to a challenge?

And what challenge would you give.

Be honest – this conversation is a little bazaar! A conversation full of hidden meanings behind living waters and being thirsty.

This is not a process that we have to use in order to challenge someone it is an example for us that we must challenge them.

Who is it out there that you are not challenging?

Who has God put you in contact with that you are not following through with?

What is the right challenge you need to make to bring that person into seeing the world they way that God sees it and seeing that there is hope in w world that looks hopeless?

What is this current crisis going to do that gives you an opportunity to challenge because believe me all of you will have opportunities and indeed you already have them as people feel helpless and start to panic buy all sorts of things.

They feel hopeless in the face of this and you have the hope they need.

Then we have the part we really do not like **Confrontation** – verses 16-18

Now for this woman the challenge was the number of men she had lived with and the man she was currently living with who she had not married.

That is an appropriate challenge in today's culture and while you may be called to use it it is the principle of the challenge you need to embrace.

In showing some one the way to Christ and so to becoming a disciple of Christ there will almost always be a challenge.

We would like people to gently drift over the line and so we do not have to do anything uncomfortable but when people drift they will usually stay on the wrong side of the line and never accept Jesus as their saviour and so never be saved.

They could even be in Church and even have been in Church for a long time but they have never made that commitment.

Everyone must accept Christ as their saviour.

It is not enough for them simply to say Yes if you ask them if they have accepted Christ they must say it for themselves.

Romans 10:9 (ANIV)

⁹ *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

You must say it yourself and they must say it themselves. Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord? If not make sure that you do and if you need help see me afterwards.

And that confrontation leads to **Conversion** – verses 19-26

And this is not some light bulb moment as it was with Saul on the road to Damascus. This is more of the Emmaus moment when the disciples realised they had been talking with their saviour.

She starts by saying he is a prophet and today many people will say that they see Jesus as a good man albeit a historical figure/

So many people are at the start of this passage but it has to go on as this conversion does.

It has to get to that point where people realise they need a saviour and Jesus can say through you those words of verse 26

John 4:26 (ANIV)

²⁶ *Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

People need to hear you say that the God who you worship, that Jesus who you acknowledge as Lord, that Spirit that guides you in life, that Triune God is the saviour of the world that they need as in individual so that they can confess with their mouths which leads to the fifth point:

A **Confessing life** – verses 39-42

The woman went back to her friends, back to her society or if you accept she was a bit of an outcast she went back to the people she normally avoided.

She didn't wait for her changed life to witness to them she wanted to tell them and see verse 39

John 4:39 (ANIV)

³⁹ *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."*

People believe in testimony. While you have confronted and challenged to get them out of the comfort zone to the uncomfortable position where they admit they have needs then they believe your testimony. This is what the Lord has done for me as we have just sung.

And a more **profound view**?

Well this is based on an aspect of Roman law.

Only people born free could marry. So if you were a slave or someone born a slave who had been free you could not marry. So verse 18

John 4:18 (ANIV)

¹⁸ *The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*

Gives us a problem.

Either the woman had five husbands each of whom died.

Or the woman had five husbands each of whom divorced her because of course the woman could not initiate a divorce.

Or a combination of the two

All of which would show a great rate of getting through husbands!

And interestingly Jesus does not condemn her for her position.

So from this scholars argue that this conversation is not about physical husbands but a theological discussion for we go from here into verses 19-26 which is quite a deep theological discussion which would be unusual for a woman since they had less education.

The Bible regularly uses the image of marriage to portray the relationship between the Church and our Lord.

Taking that image what we have here is a view of the worship of other Gods and the woman has had many Gods but is told

John 4:18 (ANIV)

¹⁸ ~~*The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.*~~

The God she is worshipping now is not the true God and it is only the true God who can be her husband using this image.

And the conversation about worship leads Christ to be able to make that remarkable statement

John 4:26 (ANIV)

²⁶ *Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

Acknowledging that he is the Messiah. He is Christ.

And so

John 4:39 (ANIV)

³⁹ *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."*

The real answer is probably a mixture of the two but this look at the story has given us many lessons:

- Simple evangelism – say it like it is. Say what it means to you “This nobody can deny”
- Our society had many husbands – we need to call them back to one.
- That means we need to confront sin in peoples life once again saying like it is.
- People need to be led to make the Decision. We must not just allow people to drift in the hope that one day they will cross the line.
- When the bible says “*Confess with your lips and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord*” it actually means that is how you are saved.
- Ensure that you also confess with your lips and believe in your heart.