

#### **John 4**

4 Jesus had to go through Samaria. 5 He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." 8 His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food.

9 The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.)

10 Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!" 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, get your husband, and come back here."

17 The woman replied, "I don't have a husband." "You are right to say, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus answered. 18 "You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth."

19 The woman said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You and your people worship what you don't know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. 24 God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I Am—the one who speaks with you." [a]

27 Just then, Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus.

31 In the meantime the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." 33 The disciples asked each other, "Has someone brought him food?"

34 Jesus said to them, "I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. 35 Don't you have a saying, 'Four more months and then it's time for harvest'? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. 36 Those who harvest are receiving their pay and gathering fruit for eternal life so that those who sow and those who harvest can celebrate together. 37 This is a true saying, that one sows and another harvests. 38 I have sent you to harvest what you didn't work hard for; others worked hard, and you will share in their hard work."

39 Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified, "He told me everything I've ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 Many more believed because of his word, 42 and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world."

## **Sermon**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Amen.

It takes courage to tell God's story. As we learn to tell our stories, we've got to deal with the difficulties of spiritual storytelling. One of the hardest things about telling our stories is being honest about the pains of the past, about the struggles we've faced, about the failures or prejudices or divisions that have caused us pain. This is difficult whether the blame is ours or the fault lies with others, because to be honest about the pains of the past requires us to be vulnerable. But that's just it: to share spiritual stories of meaning, we must take the risk of vulnerability. It takes courage to tell God's story.

Did you know that Adidas and Puma were originally the same company? These now famous shoe and apparel brands, perhaps

best known for soccer, were founded by the Dassler brothers, Adolf and Rudolf, before WWII. However, after a series of fights between these brothers, the sibling rivalry eventually tore apart more than the company, and even more than the family, but the entire town, Herzogenaurach, where both headquarters still remain. It took fifty years for members of each company to just play a friendly soccer match, which only happened in 2009. Though, if you ask the townfolk, no one believes the tensions are truly laid to rest.

This kind of sibling rivalry is at the heart of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jews and Samaritans are ethnic and religious cousins. All of the nastiness that we hear in the Scripture about Samaritans isn't about just some random tribe, but about people who share a common lineage, who also claim Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekeh, and even the well's namesake, Jacob, along with his wives Rachel and Leah, as their forebears. The antipathy between the two groups has its roots in

Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. Many of the elites were taken out of the land. Those who remained in Israel made the best lives they could in a land wasted by war, which meant they intermarried with people other than Jews and developed different social and religious customs, like worshipping on the mountain near Jacob's well rather than in Jerusalem. These people became known as Samaritans. When the last parts of Israel's Kingdom fell in 587 to Babylon, again the elites were taken into exile. As we read in Ezra and Nehemiah, these elites and their descendants eventually returned to resettle Israel. They brought back with them a set of traditions they formed while far away in Babylon and Assyria, which focused on the Jerusalem Temple and strong preferences for marrying other Jews, an attempt to retain a strong religious and cultural identity in a foreign land.

As you might expect, even though Jews and Samaritans worshiped the same God, kept remarkably similar sacrifices, and

shared a common family tree, they now looked like different people and, most problematically, each identified as God's truly chosen people. Animosity grew between them not because they were so incredibly different, but because they were so incredibly similar with a few differences, but their focus was on those differences. The reasons Samaritans and Jews didn't associate with one another was because each felt like they carried on the proper traditions of their ancestors, and so they treated the others as the unfaithful deviants. Even more than the fight that split Puma and Adidas, the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans split the entire kingdom.

Now, that history might seem complicated, but it's important, and what's most important for this story in John 4 is to know that, even though they were related, Jews and Samaritans avoided one another at almost all costs. So for Jesus to enter this space, to tell any kind of story, is a significant risk. It took courage to face it.

Here at Jacob's Well, Jesus confronts the pain of their shared past rather than runs from it. Jesus takes the risk of confronting that history, of facing the awkward collision of his Jewish identity with this Samaritan woman, all to invite her beyond that discomfort and into abundant life. That's the courage it takes to share God's story.

We too are called to bring God's story into these awkward areas, to courageously share God's goodness in the face of sin. In these areas, where vulnerability is at risk, it's important to remember that not everything is meant to be shared. Courageously sharing our story doesn't mean airing our dirty laundry. That's not helpful. That's just gossip, and gossip tells other people that we don't have appropriate boundaries. Nadia Bolz-Weber is one of many preachers who offer this advice: share from your scars, not your wounds. In other words, as we share our stories, if you're still bitter about something, or if it's causing you pain still, it's not a story to share as an invitation to deeper relationship. Jesus could

address this division between Jews and Samaritans because, for him, it was a scar, something that had healed, even though the visual evidence and even some physical discomfort remained.

That wound may not have been healed for the woman, necessarily, but look at what Jesus's sharing from his scars does: opens the door to her healing and wholeness as well. It still takes courage to share these stories, for our scars still carry uncomfortable memories. But there's a difference between discomfort and pain.

And that's the key. We need to enter the realms of discomfort. We need to take the risks. That's why it takes courage to tell God's story. Perhaps this is what needed to be said all along, but reading this Gospel this week, and reflecting on Connie Giesen's funeral preparations, has me thinking something more clearly than ever. People aren't going to join in God's story here unless we invite them here, and when they show up, we invite them back. We were able to have the Geisen clan return and gather here to celebrate



Connie's life because we invited them. That wasn't their initial plan, but plans change when God-sent invitations are delivered. Sharing our story isn't really not about newspaper paper ads or social media posts or billboards. That might let them know we exist. But they don't take courage. Only you can let them know, with your words and deeds, that they're welcome, that they're invited, that they belong. That takes courage If we want to see God's story here grow and move deeper into the heart of the NRV, that's not just possible: that's God's heart too! But we've got to speak God's heart to people for them to know God's heart.

So let's admit that we, as Lutherans, aren't typically good at inviting people into conversations about faith, or to just join us at church, and that it's going to take courage for us to make this change, and that this change is necessary if we want to see the church grow in sharing God's good news with our community.

What Jesus does here is invite this woman into a story, beyond the

wounds of her past and the scars of her present. He faces the awkwardness, acts in spite of it, and moves beyond it. Only through that invitation does she come to know the fullness of life God offers. Jesus invites her to a community beyond the painful division of Jew and Samaritan, and in that invitation she finds hope.

That's the kind of good news we have to offer when we invite people into God's story here at CLC. It will take courage to overcome the reasons that we don't share that story, that we don't associate God's story with those people. So, today, I'm going to ask you to once again reflect on someone who you think is unlikely to come to this church, someone who you don't see as a part of God's story here. Ask yourself why that is. And ask yourself what kind of courage it would take for you to follow Jesus into talking with that person despite the awkwardness, despite the history, despite the unlikely. Because with God, all things are possible.