

HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND?

John 4:5-42

Intro

The first thing that I noticed in regards to this scripture was its length: on a practical level, it felt to long to read in totality.

Therefore, I pulled out my editing pen and started to trim a few verses here and a few verses there until it got down to a length that felt more tolerable.

However, by the time I got to Thursday and I was looking at what was left, I began to feel unsettled because what I had left did not carry the same literary or theological impact as the scripture as it was initially offered. It is with this thought in mind that I encourage you look the passage up in a Pew Bible (it can be found on page 94 of the New Testament) and read (as well as hear) this story of how Jesus' evangelical message is meant to be delivered to all people, regardless of their cultural standing, and despite the sin that has pervaded their life.

The scripture reads this way.

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A 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.) ⁹ The 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.) ¹⁰ Jesus 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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but 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." ¹⁵ The 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ).

“When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with such a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

“How Was Your Weekend?”

Evangelism is a word that has been loaded with all sorts of meaning, and depending on where you stand in the theological spectrum, many of the connotations attached to evangelism are not seen in all that pleasant of a light. The dictionary has definitions make this point very clearly.

The first definition is, “a preaching of, or zealous effort to spread the gospel, as in revival meetings or by televised services”. Although this is not overly horrible, we begin to see that evangelism has been linked to individuals like Billy Graham and any of the televangelists that are seen on TV. Unless I’m mistaken, that doesn’t sound like what we do here at Three Bridges on a daily basis. This makes us feel like evangelism is something to be done by someone else other than the organized church as we are a part of it.

The second definition is even more convicting of these connotations for it says that evangelism is, “any zealous effort in propagandizing for a cause.” All of a sudden, the distance that we have felt to this word and the concept behind it becomes a complete disconnect because unless I’m missing something in this definition, evangelism could relate to political theories such as communism, nazism, fascism, or sociological ideologies like sexism or racism.

With those ideals being the overriding concepts behind evangelism, it is no wonder that mainline churches, such as the Reformed Church in America of which Three Bridges is connected, have traditionally shied away from anything relating to evangelical ventures.

However, as we have heard in the passage this morning, these modern notions of evangelism have very little connection with the model of evangelism that Jesus put forward in his life. As we were able to see, the model that Jesus sets out is more akin to a simple conversation, rather than an impassioned oratory address.

Our story sets up with Jesus being in the city of Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. After this time they traveled into the Judean countryside before ultimately heading to Galilee in the north. But before he made it there he ventured into the city of Sychar in the area of Samaria where the conversation that we have just heard takes place.

Just so everyone remembers, Samaritans and the Jews did not get along with one another even though they had each grown out of the same familial tree. The Jews viewed the Samaritans as religious half breeds and had no problems treating them in that way. It is for this reason that the conversation between Jesus (a Jew) and the unnamed woman (a Samaritan) gets off to such a confrontational start.

Jesus request for a drink surprises the woman because of the ways that Jews would avoid anything that Samaritans would use in any way. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?", with its doubt and cynicism firmly in place shows just how true this understanding is.

However, Jesus doesn't linger on this collective shot and uses it as an opportunity to talk about who he is and the living water that God the Father is able to provide through him. This understanding of spiritual water goes right over her head and they proceed to go on for several verses with Jesus talking about water in the spiritual sense and the woman talking about the sort of water that might be drawn from the well that they were before.

Eventually, Jesus gets frustrated by a conversation that is simply not being understood and he takes a different tact: her marital status. Her statement of "I have no husband", although true, is meant to hide the fact that she has been divorced five times and now is living with someone else. What the reader is meant to get out of this is that this woman is sexually promiscuous and because of her actions has been divorced five times. This reality check causes the woman to freeze. She acknowledges that Jesus is someone special by saying, "sir, I see that you are a prophet", but then immediately tries to redirect the conversation off herself, back to the religious feud between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Jesus, once again, takes this dig and spins so as to speak of the true worship that will occur in spirit and in truth.

Finally, the woman gets what Jesus has been talking about all along and states, "'I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.'" To her shock (I say this because of her later response, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"), Jesus says without equivocation, "I am he (the Messiah)". She then proceeds to head back to her home and tell people of this man whom she has spoken to.

This illustration, this example of a conversation, is the predominant form of evangelism that Jesus puts forward to those whom he comes into contact with. Yes, he does preach (the Sermon on the Mount is the first example that comes to my mind), but for the most part, he simply talks with people. That is a form of evangelism that has nothing to do with revivals, as we presently think of them, and it certainly has nothing to do with all that is televangelism is. That simple conversation is a form of evangelism that we can all take part in.

A quick example, my family is a regular patron of one of the 'not too far away from here' diners. It's simply a place that have always served us good food and done so with a wait staff that is genuinely caring.

The wonderful thing is, the more that they have begun to know us, the deeper the conversations have become to the point that we have been asked to pray for servers in their need, from marital and financial difficulties, to parents who are facing serious surgeries halfway around the world. And the prayers absolutely go the other way as well as I know that they think about and pray for our family, and again, this is just by us spending time together in a local diner.

Here's the thing, I pretty sure that many folks would look at a few of those servers and think, 'hold on a minute: what do you know about any of those people? Look at them! There is nothing about them that looks like a God follower.'

From a strait reading, this was the same reaction that the disciples had to Jesus conversation with the Samaritan woman, because, as it says in verse 27, "they were astonished that he was speaking with such a woman".

However, Jesus response of, "look around you , and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting" proclaims in no uncertain terms that the people who are to be ultimately called God's children come from all avenues of life, including, as seen in this passage, a Samaritan woman of ill repute. That was thought impossible by the disciples and yet it was so. It was so true that the Samaritan woman becomes an evangelist to the people in her community as it says in the passage, "many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony". She went from being the untouchable to a vessel of God.

The evangelical mission of the church is not to reach out to all the nice people who are already in a community of faith and have them switch denominations to worship with us. No!

The mission of the church is to reach out to the fallen and the broken of society, the sinners and all of the ways that sin is able to manifest itself, and open a dialogue that allows the seed of the Word of God to be planted in their lives and see how it takes root and grows. It may not be pretty, and it may be difficult but it is the evangelical mission that we are called serve. It may not be that you will ever see that plant harvested, but that doesn't mean that it will not be. It doesn't matter if we are gathered around the well as in Jesus time, or around the watering hole today, we are meant to deliver the evangelical message of Jesus Christ to all we meet. For example, when someone asks you how your weekend was, do you mention church at? I'm not saying that you are trying to have them believe what you believe: I'm asking if you let people around you know that you believe through the things you do. Do you let people know? Start the conversation by letting them know. 'What did you do this weekend?' 'Well, I went to church', 'after church I went to...', or church shows up in the list.

Start a conversation today and begin to plant those seeds. No matter where you go, whether it be in the hustle and bustle of downtown Three Bridges all the way to the whiles of Flemington, Somerville or beyond: no matter who you talk with, whether it be the CEO of a company or the person who is so down on their luck that the only kind of luck that they believe in is the bad kind: plant those seeds that are of God and see what unbelievable things beings to happen!

What did you do this weekend? Let them know!

After Sermon Prayer

O holy Lord, we thank You for all of the ways that You have blessed us and all of the callings that You place before us. One of these calls to service is to be Your evangelists in the world today. Lord, help us to understand that this does not mean that we have to be on TV or under a tent but that we can do it in and through our lives as they exist right now. Help us to start that conversation so that Your living water might be able to flow to yet another one of Your redeemed children. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.