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Open Your Eyes  
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John 4:1-42 (NRSV)

"Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, **tired out by his journey**, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

"A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 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.) 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**.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that **living water**? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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**.' 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.'"

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

"Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who

told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

"Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'

"Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; **and he stayed there two days**. And many more believed because of his word. 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.'"

Do you need glasses or contacts to help you see better? Have you ever had surgery of some kind to help your vision? Have you ever seen a movie in 3D for which you wore glasses that helped you to see and experience the film in ways you otherwise would not? Vision and the ability to see is one of our amazing senses. Victorian art critic John Ruskin wrote, "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world **is to see something.... To see clearly** is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one." It's easy to visualize the scripture from *John 4* as it were unfolding like the opening of a movie. Use your imagination and picture the scene. As Jesus walked through Samaria, he got tired from the exertion and the heat and he sat down by Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman came by herself to draw water. Jews and Samaritans at that time couldn't stand each other. They disagreed about certain religious issues and viewed each other as ethnically inferior. Jesus is alone at the well because the disciples have gone into the city to buy food. The fact that the woman was alone and at the well when no other women were present indicates she is socially undesirable and it's likely she looks at herself as a person of little value or worth. As John states, Jews do not share things with Samaritans and the woman is stunned that Jesus even speaks to her. Jesus is willing to cross barriers that divide people, and he initiates a conversation with someone quite different from himself asking her, "Give me a drink." I like to think of this as Jesus sharing **the gift of his need**. Jesus has a need and he's willing to be vulnerable and express it to enable someone to help and serve him. **If we reflect on our own life, do we spend more time asking Jesus to do things for us, or seeking to do things for Him?** Oswald Chambers in his devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* asks, "How many of us are expecting Jesus Christ

to quench our thirst when we should be satisfying him! We should be pouring out our lives, investing our total beings, not drawing on him to satisfy us (1/18, 1/21).”

Jesus quickly established the fact, as he had with Nicodemus in the previous chapter, that God deals with humanity based on grace. Jesus Christ is **the gift of God** who unites all people in God’s ever-expanding family, but the Samaritan woman doesn’t yet understand this Jewish man. The caring of Jesus is reflected in his willingness to take time with the woman—whose name we never learn. How willing are we to take time with other people? Jesus invites the woman to receive the gift of the living water that is eternal life. She doesn’t grasp what he’s saying or who he is, but how could she? She remains apprehensive. People today also have questions about Jesus and what he can do. Like the woman, we look at the problems we face and say, “The well is deep.” We look at Christ and say, “You have no bucket.” We can’t imagine how Jesus can help us. Yet, as the woman will discover, Christ is mighty and He is the Living Water, so the depth of our problems or the fact that we can’t see how he’ll draw water don’t matter. The question is how long we’ll keep fumbling and stumbling with our own buckets trying to do it ourselves.

In *verse 15* the woman pleads with Jesus, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus cares enough to issue an invitation, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” I want to pause here for a moment because so many male preachers and commentators have made this woman out to be a prostitute or an immoral woman and they highlight that she came in the middle of the day, alone, not when all the women would typically go to the well. While it’s true she’s an outcast, there’s nothing in the text that tells us **why** the woman had five husbands. We don’t know if her husbands died or if they abandoned her. After each marriage ended for whatever reason her prospects would’ve continued to worsen; people might even have thought she was cursed. Maybe she was like Naomi, who lost her husband and then both of her sons. We don’t know. Regardless, when Jesus expresses knowledge of her past and present situation, she realizes she’s in the presence of a man she believes is a prophet.

Either to take the focus off the pain of her personal life, or because she thinks as a prophet Jesus can answer one of the most pressing questions that divides Samaritans and Jews, she asks him a question about **where** people should worship. Jesus responds by answering **how** we are to worship—in spirit and in truth. This is a good time to note the contrast between *John chapter 3* and *4*. In *John 3*, Jesus is talking with a man named Nicodemus about entering the kingdom of heaven through a spiritual birth that involves water and Spirit. Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night” so other people wouldn’t know what he was doing, and also because symbolically he is “in the dark” about who Jesus is. Nicodemus was not willing to

be publicly associated with Jesus. Nicodemus is not just an individual he is a symbolic or representative character. Although he appears to be alone, he speaks in the plural, "We know..." Nicodemus is "a man of the Pharisees," and "a ruler of the Jews." He represents those in authority who refuse to believe in Jesus throughout the *Gospel of John*. Jesus talks with him about being "born from above" and "of the Spirit" and the need for and the possibility of a new birth that occurs through faith.

John wants us to compare the Samaritan woman to Nicodemus. She talks with Jesus in broad daylight. They also have a conversation that touches on water and the spirit. She was willing to be publicly associated with Jesus. Nicodemus came to Jesus alone, but spoke as if he was representing a group of people. She comes by herself, goes to back to her town and tells everyone she meets about her personal conversation with Christ. In both conversations the gift Jesus promised was life; eternal life, welling up and supplying every need. Nicodemus is a man of power, wealth and privilege who refuses to publicly accept or acknowledge Christ. The Samaritan woman has no power or prestige, is likely poor and of a despised race, yet she's the one who believes Jesus is who he says. **In fact, she is the first person in *John's Gospel* to whom Jesus reveals his identity (*John 4:42*).**

We've been considering Jesus and the Samaritan woman. What about the disciples? The disciples go into a Samaritan town where obviously not a single person knows or follows Christ, and what do they do? They don't talk to anyone, they don't engage with anyone, they don't bring a single person back with them to meet Jesus. Twelve male disciples go into a place where no one knows Jesus and all they come back with are lox and bagels. C'mon, man. The Samaritan woman goes back, and she returns with the whole town! Jesus tells the disciples to open their eyes, the fields are white for harvest, they were right in the midst of it and perhaps because of their bias, prejudice or fear, they didn't see the opportunity. They didn't do anything. They didn't talk to anyone. They just stayed in their holy huddle. We can't feel too superior because a similar thing is happening in our nation right now. We lament the fact that fewer people than ever are attending worship in the USA or claim a religious affiliation. Yet what are we personally doing to even get to know our neighbors better much less actively inviting them to meet Jesus like the Samaritan woman did? We can wring our hands over the decline in religious affiliation or we can see it as a tremendous opportunity because there are far more people to reach with the Gospel.

The woman at the well represents everyone outside the chosen people who, when they meet Jesus, put their confidence in Israel's Savior who has come for all people. Jesus looked for a specific response of trust, of faith, in Him. In this case, that response came both from the woman at the well and from the Samaritan community.

We know it was hard for the disciples to understand or comprehend how Samaritans could be acceptable to Jesus. Just as it can be difficult for Christ followers today to believe that some

people are acceptable to Christ for whatever reason. Throughout history people of faith have been unnecessarily preoccupied with defining who was in and who was out, who is acceptable and who is not. For example, people will say, *The Bible* is clear and then will complete the sentence. But often these people are wrong. For example, we could say, *The Bible* is clear: Moabites are bad. *Deuteronomy 23:3, 6* says, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live." The Moabites were not to be allowed to live among God's people...then we get the story of Ruth which challenges the prejudice against Moabites, and she becomes an ancestor of King David and Jesus.

The Bible is clear: *Deuteronomy 23* also says, no foreigners or eunuchs are allowed in the assembly of the Lord, then in *Acts 8*, we have the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who is welcomed into faith in the church.

*The Bible* is clear: God's people hated Samaritans, then Jesus tells a story in *Luke 10* about a Samaritan who shows mercy when a priest and a Levite do not, and Jesus has an experience with a Samaritan woman in *John 4* that shows not all Samaritans are bad and in fact many are open to faith and worshiping in spirit and truth.

*The Bible* is clear: The story may begin with prejudice, discrimination and animosity, but God's Spirit is always moving us toward love, welcome, acceptance in God's ever-expanding family.

*The Bible* is clear in calling us to open our eyes to see the people, the opportunities and the needs all around us locally and around the world. Like the disciples, we may need to ask God to see with the eyes of the Spirit so that we don't see as human beings see, but as the Lord sees who looks on the heart.

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. How many people now believe in Jesus because of our sharing with them? What a harvest the Lord, the woman and even the disciples reaped among all those people. We see the importance of caring enough to engage with people, to share and invite others to the joy that is in Christ. What began as a rest stop for a drink of water became an open door that ended up transforming a woman, an entire community, because someone cared and shared.

### **Questions for Reflection or Discussion**

1. When you were growing up, were there people you were told not to associate with (as Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with one another)? Why were you told to avoid them?
2. As someone taught to despise the Samaritans, how would you feel when Jesus decided to go through Samaria instead of taking the long way home?

3. What social, ethnic or religious barriers are difficult for you to break through or overcome? How would Jesus relate to the people you find difficult, unlikable or challenging?
4. What does it mean to worship God "in spirit and in truth"?
5. What is significant about Jesus choosing this woman, of all people, as the first person to whom he revealed his full identity (4:25-26) in the *Gospel of John*?
6. What do we learn about being a witness from the actions and response of the disciples (4:27, 31-38) and the Samaritan woman (4:28-30, 39-42)? Who is the more effective and fruitful witness? What does that tell us about how we regard and often judge other people?