

“Come on, and see!”

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Olentangy Christian Reformed Church
Columbus, Ohio
February 24, 2008*

John 4:1-42

When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was making and baptizing more disciples than John – though Jesus himself wasn't baptizing, his disciples were – he left Judea and went back to Galilee.

Now, he had to travel through Samaria. And he came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the place that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. And Jesus sat down by the well, tired out from the journey. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” (Jews don't associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

She said to him, “Sir, you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this living water from? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I will give them will be in them a well that springs up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so I won't be thirsty and won't have to keep coming here for water.”

He said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back here.” The woman answered him, “I don't have a husband.” Jesus said to her, “‘I don't have a husband.’ That's well put. Fact is, you've had five husbands. And the one you have now isn't your husband. What you've said is true.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, I see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say the place to worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you won't worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You worship what you don't know; we worship what we do know, since salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming – it's here now – when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, because those are the kind of people the Father looks for as his worshipers. God is spirit, and his worshipers need to worship him in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (the one called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all about it.” Jesus said to her, “That's who I am, the one who's talking with you.”

At that, his disciples came. They were quite surprised that he was talking with a woman. But none of them said, “What are you looking for?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then the woman left her water jar and went into the town. And she said to the people, “Come on, see a person who told me everything I've done. Could he be the Christ?” And they left the town and came to him.

Meanwhile his disciples were telling him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you don't know about.” The disciples asked one another, “Has someone brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “To do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work, that is my bread. Don't you say, ‘Four more months and the harvest comes?’ I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see the fields that are already harvest white. The harvester gets paid and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the planter and the harvester rejoice together. In this case, the saying is true, ‘One plants and another

harvests. ' I sent you to harvest what you haven't worked on. Others have done the work, and it's into their work that you have entered."

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony: "He told me everything I did." And so, when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them. And he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of what he said. And they told the woman, "We don't believe because of what you told us any more, but because we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the savior of the world."

Sermon

Here's another story in the Gospel that puzzles me. It's familiar enough, the story of Jesus and the "woman at the well." I've read this story over and over. I've preached on this story multiple times. I've read and listened to numerous explanations of this story. But I'm still puzzled by this story.

On Monday, I thought there was an obvious place to focus for this sermon. The woman says to everyone in town, "Come on, and see!" Perfect, I thought. It's not our habit to say to people, "Come on, and see," to invite people to meet the Jesus who has met us, so this is probably something we need to hear. Perfect, I thought. We're not in the habit of inviting people to church. In theory we meet with God here together every Sunday. But that doesn't impress us, not enough to be inviting people to join with us. So the woman's bold invitation probably could teach us an important lesson.

That's what I was thinking on Monday and Tuesday and probably Wednesday. But then I stumbled over this question: What, exactly, was the woman inviting people to come and see?

Jesus impressed the woman in several ways. First, she had to get over her initial disbelief. When she saw Jesus at the well, she probably didn't expect him to talk to her. She certainly didn't expect him to ask her for water – tired and thirsty or not. It just wasn't done. Not by a Jew. And she could tell he was a Jew. (It was the tassels that tipped her off, no doubt.)

Once that initial disbelief faded, the woman discovered Jesus was rather a mystic. He held out to her the hope of living water. Water that kept flowing. Water that kept on refreshing a person, from the inside out. But the woman didn't quite get it. She confused living water with well water. And her imagination didn't rise above her mundane, daily chore of fetching water.

Next the woman learned, as the conversation continued, that Jesus was a prophet. Somehow Jesus knew about all her husbands – five of them! – how they had divorced her or died on her. And he knew that her current male companion was not her husband. (Perhaps she was afraid of being tossed out again. Perhaps he was afraid of being the next one to end up in a casket. For whatever reason, they were not married.) At any rate, Jesus' knowledge of these personal details impressed the woman. "Who but a prophet would know?" she figured. So she asked him for a prophetic pronouncement. The dispute between Jews and Samaritans had smoldered for centuries. Perhaps this prophet could settle it. The question concerned the right place to worship. But Jesus set that question aside as essentially irrelevant.

Then Jesus impressed the woman one more time. When she dreamily mentioned her hope for Messiah ("the one called Christ"), Jesus claimed that identity for himself. And she started to wonder if he was more than a prophet.

So at the well the woman was genuinely impressed with Jesus, in multiple ways. That's what makes the next part so disappointing.

"Come on, and see!" the woman said. Jesus had told her, "Go and call your husband." But she went and called the whole town, everyone she could see. She wasn't shy or restrained at all. "Come on, and see!" she said. But what was she calling them to see? What impressed her about Jesus? That he spoke to her? That he asked her for water? That he promised living water? That with prophetic authority he set aside an ancient question? No. It was, "See a person who told me everything I've done." Come on, and see a fortune teller. Come on, and see a magician.

When Dorothy Gale runs away from her Kansas home, she meets up with Professor Marvel, a fake fortune teller. He tells Dorothy's fortune, and she's so impressed that she runs straight home through the rising wind. Once there, she dreams of Professor Marvel as the "great and powerful Oz."

The woman at the well is impressed by Jesus the fortune teller, so impressed that she asks, "Could he be the Christ?" I sure wish she had said more about Jesus, more about how impressive he was, before she asked that question. Of course, it doesn't matter what I wish.

Whatever its shortcomings, it was the woman's sales pitch that sent people to Jesus. They came to him, and they put faith in him. At first their faith depended on the woman's story. What a flimsy place to stand! Any fake fortune teller worth his salt could have told the woman the same things. But soon those people, and many more with them, had a better place to stand. They met with Jesus himself. For two days, they listened to him. Not a long time, but long enough to learn that Jesus was no fortune teller. Long enough to learn that Jesus was, in fact, the savior of the world.

It really was quite a surprise. What Samaritan expected a Jew to turn the world upside down? Yet an entire Samaritan town had been transformed! And what Jew expected a single Samaritan to receive the kingdom, never mind an entire town? The disciples were caught totally off guard. First, that Jesus was talking with a woman. Second, that they themselves were passing through the middle of a harvest field. They had to lift up their eyes, Jesus said. Otherwise they could never see what was right in front of them. Otherwise they could never see what was all around them. Otherwise they would never see what God was doing! They had to lift up their eyes.

So, there it is: one look at a familiar story. **And I'm left with lots of questions.** How does Jesus impress us? How does Jesus impress you? How does he impress me? I sometimes wonder if Jesus impresses us at all. But I suppose you have to get near Jesus before that can happen. You know, follow Jesus in the pages of the Gospel. Follow him onto your knees in prayer. Follow him to his bedside [yes, *his*] in a nursing home. Follow him into an awkward conversation with someone from a different faith, with someone whose skin is a different color, with someone who sleeps in her car. How does Jesus impress us?

Here's another question. Does Jesus help us to see everything we've done? He knows everything we've done – no surprise there. But does he help us to see it? To remember what we've done? To recognize the good in what we've done – and the evil? To understand the joy we've given – and the pain we've caused? Again, are we near enough to Jesus for that to happen? How would it happen?

Another question: What does it take before we say to someone else, "Come on, and see!" Has God come close to us – close enough to us in Jesus Christ, close enough to us through the Holy Spirit – for us to have a story to tell, a "come on, and see" story to tell?

The woman didn't beat people over the head with the "truth." She told them a story, her story, her Jesus-story. She didn't even tell the story very well. She left out all the most important parts. She only highlighted what impressed her most at the moment. But God was at work. The Spirit was at work in the woman and her story. And soon a town-ful of people had their own Jesus-story to tell.

Don't we have our own Jesus-stories to tell, our own "come on, and see" stories? Never the full story. Never the perfect story. Never the "answer." Never the "truth." But our story. Your story. My story. By the grace of God.

One last question, something to wonder about: What can God do when we tell these stories? What can God do when we tell our Jesus stories, when we tell our "come on, and see" stories? What can God do?

I wonder.