

“The Woman With No Name From Samaria”

Date: July 30, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 4:1-42

Theme: Significance, worth

Occasion: People of the Bible, series

Her eyes squint against the noonday sun. Her shoulders stoop under the weight of the water jar. Her feet trudge, stirring dust on the path. She keeps her eyes down so she can dodge the stares of the others. She is Samaritan; she knows the sting of racism. She is a woman; she knows the bruises of sexism.

She’s been married to five men. *Five.* Five different marriages. Five different beds. Did her husbands die, or was she rejected by five different men? Either way, she knows the pain of a broken heart.

She knows what it means to love and receive no love in return. Her current mate won’t even give her his name. He only gives her a place to sleep.

On this particular day she came to the well at noon. Why hadn’t she come in the early morning with the other women? Maybe she had. Maybe she just needed an extra draw of water on a hot day.

Or, maybe not. Maybe it was the other women she was avoiding. A walk in the hot sun was a small price to pay to avoid their glaring looks and sharp remarks. “Here she comes. Did you hear? She’s got a new man. They say she’ll sleep with anyone. Shhh. There she is.” So, she came to the well at noon.

She expected solitude. Instead she found one who knew her better than she knew herself. He was seated on the ground: legs outstretched, hands folded, his back resting against the well. His eyes were closed. She stopped and looked at him. She looked around.

No one was near. She looked back at him. He was obviously Jewish. What was he doing here? His eyes opened and she ducked her head in embarrassment. She quickly went about her task of drawing water.

Jesus must have sensed her discomfort at seeing him here, and asked for water. But she was too streetwise to think that all he wanted was a drink. “Since when does an uptown fellow like you ask a girl like me for water?” She wanted to know what he really had in mind.

Her intuition was partly correct. He *was* interested in more than water. He was interested in her heart. They talked. Who could remember the last time a man had spoken to her with respect? He told her about a spring of water that would quench not the thirst of her throat, but of her soul.

He told her, “The water I give will become a spring of water gushing up inside that person giving eternal life.” Jesus offered this woman not a singular drink of water, but a perpetual artesian well! As often happens in the Gospel of John, Jesus says one thing and people think he means something else, until he explains.

The thirst of the Samaritan woman in the heat of the day reflected the thirst of her soul, the shame burning inside her. She had gone from one man to the next. Maybe she had been forced to do so. Maybe she was destitute.

Or maybe her soul was thirsty. Perhaps she was desperate for love, desperate for stability, desperate for... life. Each of us can relate to her plight. Our souls are thirsty, and yet we turn to food, drink, and the things of this world to fulfill that desire.

But those things never satisfy. The Samaritan woman was looking for significance in her life and was hoping to find it in the right relationship. “If I just find the right man, *then* my life will be complete.” It’s not an uncommon

pursuit. And it's a legitimate desire, the desire for significance. We all have it. We all want to know that we matter.

The woman from Samaria, so insignificant we don't even know her name, reflects our own struggle for significance. We want to know that we matter. We want to know that we are loved. We want to know that our lives make a difference in this world.

The feelings of futility that come when we look to others to fill our emptiness, are merely symptoms of our need for the Savior. Our basic human need to belong, to feel loved, can lead us into situations where we rely on people who don't deserve our trust, or who cause us to do things that ultimately destroy our self-worth.

God created a hunger for significance inside each of us, and it was God's intention to have a relationship with us. Only when we turn to God's Son, Jesus, will we find the satisfaction our souls have been craving. So, let's get back to our story.

The Samaritan woman was certainly intrigued by Jesus' offer of living water. "Sir," she said, "give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

"Go, call you husband and come back," he says.

Her heart must have sunk. So far Jesus had treated her with respect, he a Jew and she a Samaritan. Here was a man who didn't treat her like a sex object, but with respect and dignity. And now he was asking her about.... that!

Maybe she considered lying. "Oh, my husband? He's busy." Maybe she wanted to change the subject. Perhaps she wanted to leave. But she didn't. She stayed and told the truth. "I have no husband."

You probably know the rest of the story. But I wish you didn't. I wish you were hearing it for the first time. For if you were, you'd be wide-eyed as you waited to see what Jesus would do next. Why? Because you've wanted to do the same thing.

You've wanted to take off your mask. You've wanted to stop pretending. You've wondered what God would do if you were really honest with Him. The woman with no name from Samaria wondered if Jesus would stop being kind when the truth came out. So, she took a risk with Jesus. And his reply?

"You're right," Jesus says. "You have had five husbands and the man you are with now won't even give you his name."

No criticism; no anger; no lectures about what a mess she had made of her life: none of that. It wasn't perfection Jesus was seeking; it was honesty.

The woman was amazed. "I can see that you are a prophet," she said. Translation? "There is something different about you. Do you mind if I ask you something?" Then she asked a question that revealed a gaping hole in her soul.

"Where is God? My people say He is on the mountain. Your people say he is Jerusalem. I don't know where he is." Jesus must have done a little dance right there on the spot. Here was somebody showing a sincere interest in finding God.

But you see that's what happens when people experience a little kindness – they lower their guard a little. They test the waters to see if the one across from them can be trusted, and then they go a little deeper. And then, barriers come down. It didn't matter that he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. Her past history with men didn't matter; it was

her desire to know God in a deeper, more intimate way that became the focus of their conversation.

And in the midst of their deep theological conversation, Jesus reveals who he really is. He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. He didn't tell that to many people, but he did to this sincere seeker.

And her life is changed. Don't miss the drama of this moment. Look at her eyes, wide with amazement. "You ...are...the.. Messiah! Watch as she scrambles to her feet, takes one look at this grinning Nazarene, and then runs home to tell her friends.

And did you notice what she forgot. She forgot her water jar. She left behind the jug that caused her to stoop when she walked. She left behind the burden she brought. Suddenly the shame of the tattered romances disappeared. Suddenly the insignificance of her life was swallowed up by the significance of the moment.

"God is here! God has come! God cares for me!" That's why she forgot her water jar. That's why she ran to the city. That's why she grabbed the first person she saw and announced her discovery: "I just talked to a man who knows everything I ever did... and he loves me anyway!"

Some of you here today need to hear that message. You've struggled with significance your whole life. You need to know God already knows all about your life – everything you ever did, and He loves you anyway. Your life matters to God.

And some of you here today already know that. Your life is filled with grace and love, and you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that your life matters. Be thankful. But also, be aware there are many people in the world just like this woman with no name from Samaria.

There are people who sit at home wondering if anyone cares. They worry that their life doesn't matter to anyone else. And they need to hear from someone, maybe someone like you, that someone does care, that their life does matter.

God gives significance to the lives of those who feel insignificant. And God places a call on our lives, if we have been blessed, to be a blessing to others. Amen? Amen.

I know this is hokey, but I'm going to ask you to do it anyway. I want you to turn to your neighbor and say these words: "God loves you, and so do I." Let's do that now. Go ahead and say it.

Now, would you turn in your bulletins and let us pray our opening prayer together again:

"Jesus – thank you for the invitation of salvation, to be made whole. Thank you that your Spirit fills us and flows through us like living water. Forgive us when we turn to other people or things for satisfaction, for we know that only in you are we quenched. We love you. Amen."

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Ten Women of the Bible* by Max Lucado. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016. Chapter 6 "The Samaritan Woman," pp. 125-142.