



Sermon Transcript October 8, 2017

Living Sent Lives Our Passion John 4:1-45

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 8, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text

John 4:1-45

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings 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 nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 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 now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 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 is seeking such people 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 (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 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, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”³⁵ Do you not say, “There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?” Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and 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 town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”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 indeed the Savior of the world.”⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee.⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

Introduction

Our passage begins by telling us that Jesus is traveling with his disciples and we find him returning home to Galilee. He was coming from Judea, which is in the south and he was returning north to Galilee. In between Galilee and Judea was a region known as Samaria. Samaritans were predominantly half Jewish and half Gentile and they weren't well received by their Jewish neighbors. Just to give you a flavor of how many of the Jews felt about their neighbors, the Samaritans, Rabbi Eliezer wrote, “He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine.”¹ That really gets to the heart of the issue for the observant Jew. Close contact with a Samaritan could render one unclean and defiled. And so often, when they would go from Judea to Galilee, they wouldn't take the most direct route by going through Samaria. Rather, they would go out around the region to avoid being unclean. (It would be like a New York Yankee fan traveling from New York to Vermont. Instead of passing right through Massachusetts, the heart of Red Sox territory, he goes out around through New York State to avoid becoming unclean! Now we understand!! It makes perfect sense!!)

But when we come to verse 4, we discover an interesting statement about Jesus and his traveling partners. It says, “*And he had to pass through Samaria.*” What was it that caused Jesus to feel it necessary to pass through Samaria? Some suggest that he was on a tight time schedule and he wanted to get back home as quickly as he could. Josephus, the Jewish historian, suggested that this would be an acceptable reason to pass through

Samaria. He wrote, “for rapid travel, it was essential to take that route through Samaria.”² But I don’t think this has anything to do with Jesus being in a hurry to get home. In fact, in the Gospel of John, whenever we see this word *must* being used to describe the necessity of Jesus doing anything, it is always tied to mission. For example in John 3:14 we read that just like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, “*so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*” Or in John 9:4 Jesus says, “*We must work the works of him who sent me.*” In other words, when words of necessity are used to describe the actions of Jesus they point to the fact that Jesus is acting on mission. He is being intentional. He is being purposeful. And more pointedly, he is being missional. Passing through Samaria with his disciples was tied to him doing what he was “sent” to do.

So what was the missional intent of Jesus passing through Samaria? Why was it of necessity for Jesus and his disciples to travel through this region that was often avoided? Why does John say, “*And he had to pass through Samaria?*” I know that a good number of us know this story and we are well acquainted with the woman Jesus encounters at the well in Samaria. And you get the sense from this story that this was not some chance encounter Jesus had with this woman. This was no doubt a divine appointment Jesus had with this woman and consequently it led to many from that town confessing about Jesus, “*we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.*” And we will consider her story this morning. But I would suggest to you that the main missional thrust of this passage doesn’t have to do with the woman at the well or even the people of the town. Rather, what made this journey through Samaria a necessity had more to do with what Jesus wanted to teach his disciples than it had to do with the woman he graciously encountered at the well.

I believe that the “punchline” of this passage is found in verse 34 when Jesus says to his disciples, “*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*” It is the passion of Jesus to live as one who is sent. And then turning to his disciples he says, “*Do you not say, ‘There are four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white unto harvest . . . I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.’*” Keep in mind, when the disciples return to Galilee they are going to return to their fishing boats and in the very near future, Jesus is going to show up on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and officially invite them to follow him. The invitation he will offer them goes like this, “*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*” So the reason it was necessary to pass through Samaria and to engage the woman at the well and to see the response of the town to Jesus was to show the disciples that this is exactly what they were being sent to do.

So from this passage, we learn something about what it looks like to live as people who are sent. Over the last three weeks we have laid the foundation that establishes that God is a sending God and that we, the church, are a sent people. So now we want to consider how to live as a sent people. What we discover from this story is that living sent lives begins with a passion for God. In the story of the woman at the well we develop a passion for what God can do in the life of a person. And in the words Jesus shares with his disciples, we discover that a key to living as people who are sent is a growing passion for God and for the will of God to be done in this world.

It is interesting to me that in this passage Jesus uses water and food to make his point. What is it that is behind the need for water and food? It is thirst and hunger. These are common human desires, passions if you will. Thirst drives me to drink. Hunger drives me to eat. It is a passion for what Jesus does in the life of a person that drives us to live as a sent people. It is a passion for God and for his will to be done that drives us to live as a sent people.

I want to begin this morning by looking at the woman at the well and I want us to consider how Jesus, the living water, is the one the one who satisfies the thirst of the soul. And then I want to consider the worker, the disciples, and how “our food” is to do the will of the one who sent us into the world. In other words, if we are ever going to live as ones who are sent, then we need a growing passion for God.

A Passion for What Jesus Can Do

John tells us in verse 6 that when Jesus was passing through this particular town in Samaria “*it was about the sixth hour.*” That is an expression that means it was 12:00, noon. It was during the heat of the day that Jesus found a seat near the well and John has no hesitation in telling us that Jesus was weary from his travel. Keep in mind how John begins his Gospel account of the life of Jesus. He begins with this exalted image of Jesus, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” By simply telling us that Jesus, the Son of God, was weary from his travel, tells us the extent to which the eternal Son of God identified with us. He knows!

While his disciples went to look for some food, Jesus sat there by the well. It was here that a woman came to draw water from the well. Jesus simply asked her for a drink. It seems like a rather innocent request. But we have already established the nature of the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. And so the woman is rather taken back that

Jesus would even ask her for a drink. In verse 9 she says to Jesus, *“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?”* And then, John fills in this editorial detail that we have already acknowledged *“For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”*

It is interesting to identify all the things in this story that could have prevented Jesus from asking this woman for a drink. We have already noted that there was a racial divide that existed between the two of them. But there was also a gender gap that came with cultural taboos we aren't overly accustomed to in our culture. I have a friend who was doing some business with an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi and in the course of their business he had the pleasure to meet the Rabbi's wife. As any of us would do, when he was introduced to her he extended his arm to shake her hand. As he extended his hand, the Rabbi moved between them and kept my friend from committing what would have been considered an inappropriate interaction between the sexes. Likewise, this woman was taken back when Jesus would ask for a drink from *“a woman of Samaria.”* The religious divide between the two of them also came up in their conversation when she brought up *“the worship war”* of the day, where to worship God. She said in verse 20, *“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”* And of course, there was a moral divide. As the conversation between Jesus and the woman unfolds, we discover she had quite a checkered past having been married five times and now living with a man who was not her husband. You can come up with a pretty long list of reasons why culturally Jesus should not be engaging this woman in conversation. There was much to divide them.

Can we pause and learn something here from Jesus? We look at this thing that existed between the Jew and the Samaritan and we think it to be somewhat silly and unnecessary. It is not like there was a freeway that circled around Samaria to ensure speedy travel. And to think that this division was so embedded in their hearts that they couldn't even take the shortest distance between two points, a straight line, when traveling north and south. And yet, we live in a pretty divided world that is not too far removed from the scenario we find in John 4. Things like race, politics, lifestyle, economics and religion not only divide us, but they are often laced with a hostile tone and prejudice. In fact, I think some of the division and the hostility we see in our culture has intensified because people get behind their computers and they say things that they wouldn't say if they were sitting eyeball to eyeball with people. The cure to some of this divisive spirit is to do what Jesus is doing here and to simply sit down and talk. I am meeting monthly with a group of pastors who are a mix of black, Hispanic and white. They come from urban and suburban churches. Some are Pentecostal and some are not. We are going to talk about things like race and poverty and justice. And I am finding

that when we get together and talk, Jesus is greater than what divides us. When this woman's life is exposed, Jesus sees her as one who is precious. The irony of it all is that she is the one who is really thirsty and Jesus has compassion to meet her need. So make it a goal this week to sit down and talk with someone who is different than you.

Jesus turns the table on this woman and he claims to have water that this woman needs. He says that his water is "*living water*." In fact he claims in verse 13, "*Everyone who drinks of this water (referring to the water in the well) will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*" Think about how hard it was just to get drinking water back then. You had to go to a well, fill a jar and carry it home. It sounded like a great proposition and so the woman said, "*Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.*" Of course, Jesus is talking about a different kind of thirst and a different kind of water. He was talking about the thirst of the soul and how Jesus satisfies the longing of the soul.

I think this is what led Jesus to bring up her past. She had been married five times and was currently not living with her husband. We don't know the details or the circumstances behind her previous marriages. Though we do get the sense that there was some guilt associated with her current situation. And I wonder if running into the arms of the man she was with at the time didn't reflect how she was trying to satisfy the thirst of her soul. Often we search for meaning and happiness and satisfaction in relationships or in things, only to find that they do not satisfy the deep thirst of the soul.

Jonathan Haidt wrote a book called *The Happiness Hypothesis*. In it, he concluded that studies find a very weak correlation between wealth and contentment, and the more prosperous a society grows, the more common is depression."³ That kind of sounds like our culture, doesn't it? In other words, the things people think will satisfy the thirst of the soul actually don't. Only God can satisfy the deep thirst of the soul. When Jesus speaks of "*living water*" he is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit who brings us alive unto God. In John 7:38-39 Jesus says, "*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.*" St. Augustine put it this way in his famous book *Confessions*. Here he says to God, "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁴

Jesus says to this woman that this water he has leads to eternal life. It lasts! It endures! It quenches the thirst of the soul. It doesn't mean that we can't find joy in loving other

things or in loving people. But, the soul is only satisfied when we love God more. In this life, we can and will lose the ones we love. But we never can lose God. And with Jesus, the possibility stands that we won't lose each other. In fact, there is an atheist by the name of Luc Ferry who summarized the writings of Augustine on this thought by saying, "In the Christian view, no one can lose the individuals he loves, unless he ceases to love them in God; in other words, ceases to love what is eternal in them, bound to God and protected by Him." To which he adds, as an atheist, "This promise is, to say the least, tempting."⁵ But, it is more than tempting! It is real.

This is at the heart of what Jesus can do in the life of a person. Because we fail to love God and love others the way we should, we sin. We look to other things to satisfy the thirst of our soul. But when Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh and died on the cross for our sin, he made a way for us to come to God and thus satisfy the thirst of our souls. When you begin to realize that out of love for you, Jesus died for you, you in turn can love him for the sheer beauty of who he is. Psalm 63 says it this way, "*Because your love is better than life . . . I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*"

This is the living water offered to the woman at the well and it is offered to you this morning. It is knowing what Jesus can do in the life of a person that gives us the passion to live as people who are sent. Only Jesus can satisfy the thirst of your soul.

A Passion for the Will of God to be Done

We move now from the woman to the workers, the disciples. They were off looking for some food while Jesus was having this conversation with the Samaritan woman. When they returned, they were somewhat surprised to find Jesus engaging this woman in conversation. They didn't say anything, but the text tells us that "*they marveled that he was talking with a woman.*" And so after the disciples arrived, the woman left and left her water jar behind and went into the town to tell others about her conversation with Jesus. She told everyone she could find, "*Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*" And out came the people of the town to meet this man, Jesus, whom she told them about.

When you come to the end of this story, we discover that Jesus stays two days with these people and many in the town become convinced that Jesus is "*indeed the Savior of the world.*" Do you find it interesting that Jesus reached this town through this woman? It is a good principle of evangelism and church planting. Often it is through the "harvest"

that God reaches the “harvest.” When we talk about church planting, we are not talking about raising \$100,000 and hiving off a 100 people to go plant a church. Rather, we are talking about investing in developing leaders who will reach into the harvest and reach people who most likely would never join us for a morning service. Our goal is not to relocate and redistribute a bunch of Christians, though some of us may choose to go. But rather, we want to reach the harvest. Tim Keller wrote an article called *Why Church Planting*. In it, he said, “Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years old gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations.”⁶ It wasn’t the disciples who reached this town. It was a woman, married five times and currently not married to the man she was with, but who encountered Jesus and she reached her town.

So the disciples offer Jesus something to eat, but he says to them, “*I have food to eat that you do not know about.*” One can wonder what passed through their minds when they heard Jesus say this after searching high and low for food. But again, Jesus was not talking about physical food. Instead, he says in verse 34, “*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*” That really is a great statement that gets to the heart of the matter of what it means for us to be live as people who are sent. When you hear that we are to live as a people who are sent, it sounds like an activity that we are to be engaged with and something we are to do. That is true. But what propels us to live as people who are sent is that we are caught up with the wonder and the glory of God. Do you know what drives us to live as people who are sent? Do you know what our “food” is that sustains us? We want more and more people to come into the joy of knowing the all satisfying love of God.

John Piper wrote a book about missions and I love the title and main thesis of the book. The book is called *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. And here is the thesis of the book. He writes, “Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this world is over and countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.” Then he says, “Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.”⁷ And so we can’t commend to people what we ourselves don’t cherish. If we are ever going to be compelled to live as a sent people, then we ourselves, like the woman at the well, need to first cherish the glory and the gladness of knowing God. Or as Jesus put it, “*My food is to do the will of him who*

sent me and to accomplish his work.”

So here is the “punchline” of the passage. Here is why it was necessary for Jesus to pass through this town in Samaria. He says to his disciples in verses 35-38, *“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and 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.”*

When Jesus says, *“Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest,”* does it strike you that Jesus is talking about a group of people the disciples most likely never would have dreamed that they would have come to Christ? They are Samaritans! She was a woman with a reputation! But Jesus says, “Look!” “Lift up your eyes!” Don’t lose sight of where and when Jesus encountered this woman. It was in the normal course of the day. She happened to cross his path. Tomorrow, would you simply “Look!” Would you simply, “Lift up your eyes and see!” But then notice what Jesus has sent us out to do! He sent us out to “reap.” The assumption is that there is a harvest to be had. Jesus says, *“The fields are white for harvest!”* So what is holding us back? Perhaps we are not living as people who are sent.

Conclusion

So what is a next step for us as we conclude this sermon? I can think of several from which to choose.

First of all, if you are that woman at the well, your next step is to repent of your sin and turn in faith to Jesus. He is the living water who quenches your thirst and satisfies the longing of your soul. He stands ready to forgive you of all your sin. There is no rest until you find your rest in him.

For the disciple, the follower of Jesus, who is called to live as one who is sent, I offer three thoughts. First of all, mission is born out of passion for God. So, simply put, may God and your love for God increase. How does that happen? Through worship, through community, through time in the Word. May your passion for God grow and increase.

And then, very practically, I offer you two thoughts. Look around you tomorrow and actually see the people you come in contact with on a regular basis. That is where the

harvest is at and the fields are white unto harvest. But you first have to see the people around you. And then, very simply, talk with people who are different than you. Let the walls come down and deal with your own prejudice, but also begin to look for the ways to offer living water that will satisfy the thirst of the soul. As you do this, God will form a genuine love for others.

¹Leon Morris *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 226

²Ibid., 226

³Jonathan Haidt *The Happiness Hypothesis: Putting Ancient Wisdom and Philosophy to the Test of Modern Science* (London: Arrow Books, 2006) 89

⁴Augustine *Confessions*, trans. Chadwick, p. 3 (book 1, chapter 1)

⁵Luc Ferry *Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living* trans. Theo Cuffe (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011) 85

⁶Tim Keller, "Why Church Planting" www.Acts29.com January 9, 2012

⁷John Piper *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993) 35

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**COMMUNITY
GROUPS**

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Describe the natural places where you engage people on a regular basis. What are those places and people like?
2. How are you doing with your “next step of obedience?”
3. Share one thought you had about the sermon that spoke to you.

Diving Into The Word

4. Read John 4:1-6 and observe how Jesus did what he did with a sense of purpose (“And he had to pass through Samaria.”) How do you seek to live with a measure of purpose and a sense of mission?
5. Read John 4:7-26 and discuss what it is about knowing Jesus that satisfies the thirst of the soul. How do those around us seek to quench their thirst?
6. Read John 4:31-38 and discuss what Jesus means when he says, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me.” What can we do to “cherish” Jesus more and how will this compel us to live as people who are sent?
7. Read John 4:27-30 and 39-45. What encouragement do you take from Jesus using this woman to bring her town to Jesus? What encouragement do you find in verses 35-38?

Taking It Home

8. What do you need to do to actually “look and see” the people around you? How can you be more aware of the “chance encounters” presented to you on a daily basis and where can you talk with someone different than you?
9. Are there any prejudices to overcome in your life? Where so?