

John 4. 5-42 & Romans 5. 1-8

The Woman at the Well

(Slide 1) **The Samaritan Women at the Well** is a favourite of so many of us. It's certainly one of mine. I find it so moving and so powerful. It's not possible to cover everything, in this talk, but it's great to have the opportunity to 'share my thoughts'.

Interestingly, it only appears in the Gospel of John. Maybe that's because, John just loved to tell about personal encounters, there was Nicodemus last week and we have the man born blind next week, but.. as with all Johns writings there is always more to discover!

It began as a meeting between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at a well, however, it goes on to reveal the life-giving nature of Jesus.

The writer, Joyce Rupp unfolds the story like this:

(Slide 2)

It was just a drink of water
But it was breaking the rules.
It was just small talk at a well
But its content was of abundant life.

A Samaritan woman with her water jar made her way to the well,

in the noonday heat, alone.

Did neighbours shun her?

Did she choose this time to avoid them?

What was her name?

She met Jesus

And he accepted her just as she was,

In her place, and her time.

Their chance meeting place, was beyond her city,

At a well- A gift from Jacob,

Life giving for generations, but here is a better offer:

Living water, a spring gushing up for eternal life.

No longer will Her mountain, His Jerusalem,

Her temple, His temple, be the way to God.

The living God is released

As she listens intently,
A veil lifts from the drudgery of daily life.
Softly she says,
“I know that the Messiah is coming.
When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us”.

Jesus replies “I am He”.

Does time stand still? as belief, hope and reality rock to and fro?
There is a sense of urgency as the water jar is left,

**And, returning to her city,
She has to ask,
“He cannot be the Messiah? can he”?**

So, as we unpick this narrative, what is it showing us?

Firstly, it demonstrates how individuals matter to Jesus. **(Slide 3)** Even though he was tired and hungry, He still takes time to talk and to minister to this one woman. Their conversation moved from a simple request for a drink, to the offer of living water and the hope and the love that only Jesus can give.

In her shoes, I think, she is likely to be deeply frightened, the two of them are alone together. By the standards of her society she should not have been speaking to Jesus, it is culturally scandalous! This goes against all social conventions at the time, never mind the religious ones. Rabbis would forbid other rabbi's from **even** greeting a woman in public.

Her vulnerability is heightened by her complicated past and circumstances; lets imagine the scene: she is out on her own, isolated, could her eyes be squinting against the sun. Are her shoulders stooped under the weight of the water jar **and under the weight of her life**. I wonder if her feet dragged along the dusty path. She arrives to draw water at the hottest part of the day, possibly so she can avoid encountering others and **then** there is Jesus and he speaks to her! **She should not** be talking back to this man.

We see in this Samaritan woman, a person who is probably a social outcast, with a history of broken relationships, but Jesus knew all about that, her past, her sins, but **his love and grace** are radically demonstrated in her story.

And so my **Second** point: Jesus is showing us how to approach people **(Slide 4)** who are broken and wounded. There is no criticism, no anger, no ‘what a mess you have made your life’... **she didn’t need a lecture** –she needed... **Living Water**.

The woman was astonished saying, “I can see you are a prophet,” it’s likely that she sensed something about him. The conversation with the woman leads into successive insights into **who Jesus** is. For the first time, Jesus admits he is the Messiah **“I am He” (Slide 5)**

She then asked Him where can I find God? Her people believed it was on the mountain, while His people claimed it was in Jerusalem. Remarkably, this unnamed woman became the first person to whom Jesus openly disclosed his identity as the Messiah. So **Thirdly** we learn that revelations about God often come in unexpected places and unexpected people. **(Slide 6)**

Maz Lucado comments:

Of all the places to find a hungry heart – Samaria

Of all the Samaritans to be searching for God – a woman

Of all the women a five time divorcee

And of all the people to be chosen to personally receive the acclamation **“I am He”** is probably the most insignificant person in the town!

And so, this brings me to my next **(4th)** point, **(Slide 7)** Jesus shows us God’s love is radically inclusive regardless of gender or ethnicity or lifestyle. The animosity between Jews and Samaritans at the time causes us to consider just how very unusual this scene really is and how inclusive it is. The Message Bible translates verse 9: ***‘Jews would not be caught dead talking to Samaritans’*** .

This longstanding division between various groups could be observed in some of our contemporary interactions too. Its worth considering the barriers and unintended biases we hold, to take time to challenge our assumptions.

Here at the well, we witness Jesus reaching out across boundaries sharing HIS living water with us all. Jesus, the Saviour (the Universal Saviour of Johns account, the Saviour of everyone) is the Hope of the Gospel. **(Slide 8)**

Their conversation leads the woman, in her excitement, to leave her water jar, suddenly her life is changed - **God is here, God has come, God cares for me.**

She expresses great joy running to tell others about Jesus. It's remarkable the difference in her, between before and after meeting Him **(transformation)**. Her approach to evangelism is notable: "Come and see a man, who told me everything, I have ever done." She was hiding from them before!

Rather than simply informing her community of Jesus's identity, she encourages them to investigate and draw their own conclusions, **"come and see"** and they say: "It is no longer because of what **you** said, that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."

What an unlikely evangelist, she was, the first to bring the gospel to her community. They recognised that the words Jesus spoke were not just human words but the **very words of God**, and... they had a life changing impact.

Like this woman we also have the opportunity to share our story and talk about Jesus **(Slide 9)** to say **"come and see"**. My last **(5th)** point is we are all evangelists!

Jesus took time to care for one individual. We may be called to do the same, to share our story to **JUST ONE** person.

Mother Theresa said **(Slide 10)** "Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest to you".

God has placed us, **here**, just as He placed others where they are, to share our story of what Jesus means to us. Can we help someone else discover Jesus who breaks through boundaries, who knows us completely, who loves us unconditionally, and who gives us hope and healing, that will change their story forever.

In our reading, from Romans, (Slide 11) we find Paul telling us in Verse: 8 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'.

God didn't wait till we were "good enough" to bring us his salvation. God sent Jesus when we were lost, and desperately needing his grace. He knew all about the Samaritan woman and He knows all about us. There is nothing in our nature that is worthy of his love. But nonetheless he chooses to save us from ourselves.

When we testify to living water, **(Slide 12)** people believe, **through Him - not through us!** Just be ready to pray and... let the Spirit do the rest! He offers to all who are thirsty, life giving water gushing up to eternal life. **An ordinary day is suddenly transformed by an extraordinary encounter with Jesus.**

(Slide 13) With joy, we draw water from the wells of salvation, may we drink deeply, may we tell the story of Jesus the one who sees every part of us and sets us free in His love.

I will end with a question: Are we ready to leave **our water jars** and whatever it is we are carrying in them to **share this living water** or not...

Prayer:

Lord, we come to you and drink your living water. We pray that you would use us so that others may believe in you. We pray, like the Samaritan women, at that well so long ago, we also will spread your love. Amen.