

Beginning to Reach Out - John 4

Beginnings

“The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

“I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another

Beginning to Reach Out - John 4

Beginnings

reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.””

(John 4:1-42 NIV)

We often underestimate the power of one conversation, one friendship, one question. We often underestimate the effect that we could have on one other person.

I can remember the effect of one man on my life - his name was Johnny - I didn't know him at all - yet Jan was given his name and number since he was a recovering alcoholic. Johnny took time and came over and saw me - I think the first time I met him I was completely drunk. One of the subsequent times I met with Johnny he took me to my first AA in World's End in Chelsea. I can't recall meeting him after that but I know that the time he took to be with this drunk was one of the key moments in my recovery.

I can remember the effect of another man called David - he was the speaker at a summer youth camp I was attending. He was a university professor and as far as I can remember a quiet man. He took time that week and showed me that it was ok to be a Christian - I met him after the weeks camp and he taught me more of the faith - the fact that I can remember that!

One person - great effect.

You are surrounded by people daily - you have such an opportunity to be Christ to them - not seeing each person as an evangelistic opportunity, but as a person truly loved by God - and you!

We want to reach out - but did Jesus leave us any examples of how to do that?

1. Bridge the Gap

I can remember being brought up in Scotland that we took the text very seriously which says: “[Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,](#)” (2 Corinthians 6:17 KJVS). This was a call not to be inclusive and welcome strangers. If you wanted to take communion in our church you had to have a letter from your home church to say that you were in good standing and, in fact, a Christian.

Often our fear of being inclusive is a fear of being intimidated or a worry that we will dilute what we believe - neither of which need to be true. Jesus teaches us not to be intimidated by the differences we see in people - whether that be race, gender, religion or politics. He teaches us to be bridge builders - bridging divides rather than deepening them.

A church is most like a church when it is full of diverse groups of people. Full of people on a journey. Full of people seeking and searching for truth.

Beginning to Reach Out - John 4

Beginnings

In this story of Jesus we see him reach across **religious** divides - expand on Jews and Samaritans.

1-3 Jesus' early ministry in the region of Judea was gaining attention, especially by the Pharisees, who constituted the ruling religious class. The growth of any messianic movement could easily be interpreted as having political overtones, and Jesus did not want to become involved in any outward conflict with the state, whether Jewish or Roman. In order to avoid a direct clash, he left Judea and journeyed northward to Galilee.

4-5 The shortest route from Jerusalem to Galilee lay on the high road straight through Samaritan territory. Many Jews would not travel by that road, for they regarded any contact with Samaritans as defiling. By the time of Jesus a strong rivalry and hatred between Jews and Samaritans prevailed. The words "had to" translate an expression of necessity. As the Savior of all humanity, Jesus felt he had to confront the smoldering suspicion and enmity between Jews and Samaritans by ministering to his enemies.¹

In this story we see Jesus reach across gender divides - expand on the **gender** divide - The well of Jacob lies at the foot of Mount Gerizim, the center of Samaritan worship. The "sixth hour" would probably have been about noon, reckoning from daybreak. It was an unusual time for a woman to come to a village well for water. Perhaps the Samaritan woman had a sudden need, or perhaps she did not care to meet the other women of the community, who may have shunned her because of her general character.

Question: As I interact with people in everyday conversations, am I focused on breaking down stereotyping and building bridges instead?

2. Pose Questions

The first thing Jesus does was to ask a question to find out if the woman would be prepared to talk. This is something that Jesus did frequently - ask questions.

The whole conversation is couched in terms that the woman could understand. Even when Jesus talked of eternal truths he was able to use the woman's present experience (water) and gives her a handle to grasp it. Jesus was relevant in his conversation.

¹ Samaritans: the name given to the new and mixed inhabitants whom Esarhaddon (B.C. 677), the king of Assyria, brought from Babylon and other places and settled in the cities of Samaria, instead of the original inhabitants whom Sargon (B.C. 721) had removed into captivity (2 Kings 17:24; comp. Ezra 4:2, 9, 10). These strangers (comp. Luke 17:18) amalgamated with the Jews still remaining in the land, and gradually abandoned their old idolatry and adopted partly the Jewish religion.

After the return from the Captivity, the Jews in Jerusalem refused to allow them to take part with them in rebuilding the temple, and hence sprang up an open enmity between them. They erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, which was, however, destroyed by a Jewish king (B.C. 130). They then built another at Shechem. The bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans continued in the time of our Lord: the Jews had "no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9; comp. Luke 9:52, 53). Our Lord was in contempt called "a Samaritan" (John 8:48). Many of the Samaritans early embraced the gospel (John 4:5-42; Acts 8:25; 9:31; 15:3). Of these Samaritans there still remains a small population of about one hundred and sixty, who all reside in Shechem, where they carefully observe the religious customs of their fathers. They are the "smallest and oldest sect in the world."

Beginning to Reach Out - John 4

Beginnings

Maybe some of you will feel uncomfortable asking a question - I just don't know what to ask!?! It doesn't need to be a spiritual question to get a conversation started. Build bridges through asking questions.

3. Be Loving

This conversation takes time. Jesus doesn't rush things. This is not an evangelistic project - this is a person with real needs, real problems, real hurts. He sees her as someone to be loved not converted. Through the entire conversation Jesus deals with her as a person in her own right, with her unique history and special longings. She emerges in the account as a credible character with personal dignity - because Jesus treats her as such. Simply put, Jesus loved her and was prepared to breach age-old conventions to reach her. Nothing is so guaranteed to draw others to share our living water than an awareness that we genuinely care about them.

'Our failures in evangelism are so often our failures in love...People want to know that we care before they care about what we know'²

People are not projects. They are people and we must love whether they accept what we say or reject what we say.

That's what Jesus was all about - love.

4. Give Hope

This is what we're all about - HOPE.

H = hope is an issue of the heart - it's not some intellectual thrill - it's deep inside of us.

O = hope is about others - sharing the hope that we have with others.

P = hope issues in praise to the God of all hope

E = hope is about eternal life - not length but quality starting now

There is so much God offers to those who would receive. Jesus offered life giving, thirst quenching water to a woman at a well.

What other offers are available?

To those filled with shame - grace and forgiveness for you today.

To those bound up in destructive habits - when the son sets you free you will be free indeed

To the weak - strength on wings like eagles

To the weary - Jesus promises rest for your soul

To the poor - richness of spirit

To those who lack - provision in due time

To the grieving - consolation and comfort

² The Message of John, Milne, 86

Beginning to Reach Out - John 4

Beginnings

To the sick and dying - eternal life and new beginning

His moral integrity and directness

What Jesus offers her is no easy believism. The effects of the fall on her life are not swept under the carpet. The woman's response to Jesus invitation was an emotional one, but it was also moral, involving new relationships and a new sensitivity to her behavior.

The effect of this one conversation was overwhelming - many from the town came to follow Jesus. All because of one conversation.

Reflect on your own journey to faith - I suspect for many for many of you it was one person that took time with you that led you to that point of following Jesus - why can't you be that one person for someone else?