

# **“Radical Inclusiveness”**

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Providence United Methodist Church  
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The gospel lesson for today is taken from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of John, verses 5 through 42. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 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."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right

in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.

What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is 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.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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 truly the Savior of the world.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. God who includes all who would receive him, bless the hearing of your word today. Open every heart and move within us. Be living water for us as we draw water from the deep well of your living word. Grant us understanding as we open ourselves to all people and establish relationships connecting with others in our community. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

The word of God says that Jesus left Judea and started back toward Galilee. Jesus didn’t take the long way around Samaria to avoid the Samaritans like the Israelites did. He took the route right smack dab through the middle of Samaria on purpose. He was making a point, and to the Jews and the Samaritans, he was making a radical inclusive point!

Scripture says “Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar.” He was weary from his travels. The disciples traveling with him made a bee line toward the town to pick up some food. It was noontime. It was hot. It was the time of day nobody would have gone out to draw water from a well. Unless that is they were going at that time in order to avoid confronting others. Jesus sat down on the side

of a famous well—the one Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Probably dripping with sweat, he wiped his forehead with his sleeve, and then waited.

Women were the water gatherers in that day, and they did it in the cool of the early morning. But as Jesus was sitting there cooling off a bit, a Samaritan woman came by to draw some water. Jesus asked her for a drink. She was taken back a bit wondering why a man, much less a Jewish man, was even speaking to her. Plus she was a woman, and it was forbidden to give a woman a greeting or to talk to one on the street—not even your own wife much less somebody else’s wife!

The woman knew the Jews hated Samaritans. They were called half-breeds—half Assyrian and half Jewish. They had their reasons they thought! It went back to a historical time period at the death of Solomon when the Assyrians resettled the area. They married some of the Jews, and from a Jewish perspective, this meant a loss of racial and religious purity.

I imagine the Samaritan woman was perplexed and confused. I can hear her thinking, “Who the heck is this guy? It’s bad enough the women mock, demean, and run me off, now here’s *a guy* waiting to do the same!” I can almost feel her recoiling inside herself and trying to look invisible. Funny thing is, when she began to engage with Jesus in some conversation, she felt at ease. Her feeling connected with her rejection in the village was constantly with her. I doubt if she had any friends.

Jesus knew the woman’s history. Jews normally allowed 3 marriages, but this woman had had 5 was currently living with another. In that day and age her reputation was a scandal. What Jesus made her aware of in their conversation was that her relationships just weren’t working. He didn’t condemn her, but spoke to her in a way that made her feel accepted and loved. He spoke to her as one with personal dignity. She felt valued as a person.

My point is this. Jesus reached out to a woman despite the social taboos of that time period. He didn't judge her for her past, but used it as a hinge to allow a door to open. She opened that door and walked through. They conversed and the woman was changed. She received healing and encouragement from Jesus. His words brought healing. His acceptance of her brought love to her heart. The living water was Jesus himself that flowed from him to her. His radical inclusiveness won her to the Lord. Immediately, she ran into the city to other Samaritans who believed in Jesus because of her testimony.

The Samaritan woman won a lot of people to the Lord. What would you say were some of the things that made it possible for Jesus to engage with her in conversation? . . . . . Jesus was a praying man, and praying men follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. They listen and do what the Spirit of God leads them to do. They take time to reach out and connect with those whom they feel God is leading them to speak to. They love as Jesus loves and accept others right where they're at.

That's how I was evangelized. I was made to feel like a person of dignity—regardless of what others thought. Someone took time for me. It was a man who was married and had 2 kids. He loved his wife. He developed a friendship with me. He showed me the love of God and took time helping me as a young adult. He had his car up for sale, and I needed one. He used that opportunity, and he won me to the Lord. He didn't need to worry about his reputation. He was respected and looked up to. God uses people who listen to the Spirit's leading. People who want to give themselves for others—who reach out and make a connection.

Are you that kind of person? Are you willing to take the time to spend with others who need you—people who you discern are truly seeking a better way of life? Or maybe you feel a compelling need to help them as best you can. Is your

time ever wasted? I don't think so. Are you willing to reach out and connect with someone relationally or do you feel that's someone else's ministry? I challenge you today; find a way to reach out. Pray, and follow the leading of the Spirit. Let's be radical in our inclusivity!

Let's pray. Holy and relational God, give us courage to build relationships with others in our community we've never met before. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Lord you said you have given us power to be witnesses in our community. Help us to engage this power. And if we're weary, let us sit down on the side of a well as Jesus did or in today's setting, let us sit down in a restaurant or a bar or a library and wait till you send us someone to connect with. Help us to break through all the barriers present in our minds and hearts and listen to your Spirit as it calls us. Well up within us this water that lives to compel us to give ourselves for others. We pray in the loving name of Jesus the Christ, The Messiah, The Anointed One. Amen.