

Crossing Paths (John 4:5-42)

When we cross paths with strangers, most of the time the interactions are casual. We hope our seatmates will ignore us on the airplane and we equip ourselves with the earbuds or reading material that show we are busy. We thank the person who holds a door open or the bagger at the grocery store. We smile at the attractive toddler on the playground or at the library; at most, we make eye contact with the parent standing watch. When the casual encounter comes with someone visibly different from us, we may ignore, or we may overcompensate. The particularly outgoing among us may compliment the color someone is wearing or ask how old a child is, but mostly we keep moving. Occasionally, though, we make an unexpected connection.

The woman who came to draw water at noon could see a man sitting there as she approached. She may

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have wondered how or if he would speak to her at the well, where famous matches had been made. Would he be flirtatious, or rude, or would he simply ignore her? Coming closer, she could see from his closing that he was Jewish. When he asked for a drink, she expressed surprise that he would be willing to take water from a Samaritan woman.

Suddenly they went deep into the well of living water.

Why did Jesus ask her to go and call her husband? The unfortunate result of this moment in the narrative has been centuries of preaching that dismisses her as a loose woman, even a prostitute. Perhaps we miss the point when we try to chase down the implications of her marital history.

Jesus knew her.

This story has no parallels in the other Gospels, although Jesus did have a brief and contentious interaction with another foreign woman, a mother

seeking healing for her daughter, in Mark and Matthew.

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The difference here is that Jesus taught her. He knew not only her history but her capacity for faith. There was no secret-keeping here. She knew the Messiah was coming, and Jesus revealed himself to her. He knew she was a woman of strength, one who would talk back and not let other people's opinions keep her from speaking up. He knew she was a person who could spread the word.

Jesus knows us too.

There may be things we wish we could hide from God, pieces of our stories we hope we will not have to confess. The good news for all of us is that God knows us and has work for all of us, no matter who we are or where we have been or what has happened in our lives. If Jesus appeared at noon today, sitting in the town square or the prayer garden

or at the brew pub down the road, he would actually know us, just as he knew the woman.

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Is it daunting to think of being known so intimately?
Or is it a relief?

There is living water for all of us.

The point of the conversation Jesus has with the woman at the well is never about her having five husbands, yet readers of this scripture gravitate toward that point. We do not even know why she had five husbands. Was it because she was forced into levirate marriage, the practice of marrying your deceased/incapacitated husband's brother(s), so that the first husband's lineage will continue? Were her husbands, one after the other, conscripted by the Roman army to fight and killed in battle? Whatever the reason, the fact that she has had five husbands is not the point. The point is—Jesus

knows who she is. Jesus truly sees her and loves her.

While the twelve apostles of Jesus have a hard time believing in Jesus as the Messiah, the Samaritan woman trusted in Jesus because of their one

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conversation. She does not require a super-natural event to believe; all she need to hear is that Jesus knows her and is willing to speak to her, to be in a relationship with her.

Living in the 21st century implies that we might not see miracles as they were reported to have happened during the time of Jesus. And yet we do still hope for and witness miracles in our lives. We witness God's miracle when we are empowered to love one another and fight for justice. The Word of God is most compelling when it is manifested through visible signs of love. We share God's love when we pay attention to the people around us—when we seek to know them as full people, to

know their story, and to understand their perspective. Others come to believe in the Messiah, the Christ, because the miracle that truly speaks to us all is—love.

Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, and he showed an intriguing interest. However, there were

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some matters that she had to straighten out before she could ever have the living water. There was the matter of sin in her life, of worship, of the Messiah, and of laboring for God. Therefore, Jesus began to discuss these subjects with her, one by one.

This Scripture story is one of the most profound revelations of Jesus: He is the Living Water, the water which men can drink and thereby never thirst again. Jesus promised the living water of spiritual rebirth. However, something had to be discussed before spiritual rebirth could be given: the subject of sin.

Man's whole concept and approach to worship is changed by Jesus in this passage. The place of worship is not what is important. True worship and salvation are from the Jews, through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And true worship is worshipping God in spirit and truth.

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This passage is also a dramatic picture of conversion and witnessing. The Messiah was discovered, and the discovery was excitedly shared.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in John?

This scripture reading tells of Jesus breaking social, gender, and religious barriers to engage a Samaritan woman, offering "living water" that provides eternal

satisfaction. It shows that the gospel is for everyone—regardless of race or gender. Key lessons include that salvation is for everyone regardless of their past, offering grace and a new start. True worship is in Spirit and truth, not about a specific location like the mountain or Jerusalem. And that personal encounters with Jesus lead to evangelism.

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Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to the fields that are ripe for harvest. Let us see in the people around us who are thirsty for your living water. Thank you for giving us this example of a great Gospel harvest. May we never consider anyone beyond hope, but boldly share the Gospel with them with grace and truth. Help us to set aside the things that don't satisfy our souls. Open and prepare our hearts to

encounter you. We ask this in the name of Your Son
and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**