

Sermon for Sunday, Feb. 1, 2026

John 4:1-42

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The author of the gospel of John is a skilled story teller and knows how to arrange the narrative so that we learn a lot about Jesus, his ministry, and by extension God's intent for the world. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well follows on the heels of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. There's a contrast between the two stories. Nicodemus seeks out Jesus and does so at night. The Samaritan woman does not seek out Jesus—she's just going to a well to get water, a common chore. It is unusual to do this task during the hottest and brightest part of the day; a fact that has led to many pages of commentary about what this woman's life situation actually is and I will make comments about that a little later. But notice that she interacts with Jesus during the day as compared to Nicodemus. Finally, an argument can be made that at the close of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, Nicodemus still doesn't "get it." He doesn't understand Jesus or appear to have any inkling that he is here for a specific God-given purpose. The only title he gives Jesus is rabbi or "teacher." BUT, the Samaritan woman does get it. She is the one who leaves behind her water jar, runs into the village and says, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Notice that her words are not a statement but rather a question. She isn't sure, but she is willing to drop everything and ask the people of the village to come and see for themselves.

Let's spend time to today focusing on this Samaritan woman. Over the decades much ink has been spilled over her; most of it accusing her of being a "loose woman." Many commentators try to explain why she has had five husbands and by extension pin all blame on her. But there is another way of looking at her situation. In ancient times a woman's primary task was to produce children for her husband. If she was unable to conceive he could divorce her—send her away. There would be no way to prove whether her body was at fault or his. Now another possibility is that her first husband died and she was "trapped" in what is called the "Levitical system" wherein if a married man died and there were no offspring from that relationship, a brother was to marry the widow and

attempt to impregnate her; doing so on behalf of the deceased. Whatever the actual situation for the woman in today's Scripture reading it is reasonable to assume that she is barren (unable to conceive) and looked at with disdain by most people in the village.

Since we are never told the specific details of her story there is really just one thing that we can say and that is that she has had a very hard life with a great deal of pain and sorrow.

After her conversation with Jesus (the longest recorded conversation between Jesus and anyone in the gospels) she hurries back to the village leaving behind her water jar. At first glance this detail doesn't appear especially important, but in fact my friends, it is significant. Why does she leave behind her water jar?

Commentator Karoline Lewis writes, "Is she in a hurry, excited about sharing what happened at the well? Did she simply forget and now she will have to return later in the day to pick it up?" These reasons are sound and very practical. Sometimes the simplest explanations are the most accurate.

Lewis challenges us to consider a deeper theological premise. Lewis continues, "If we press a theological question, what did she leave behind at the well? [Not just her water jar but also]...She leaves behind her ostracism, her marginalization, her loneliness, because Jesus has brought her into his fold. She leaves behind her disgrace, her disregard, and the disrespect she has endured to enter into a new reality, a new life that is abundant life."

This story, my friends, demonstrates the power of God through Jesus to turn a person's life around. If the woman went to the well at noon because she was avoiding contact with other people, then leaving her water jar behind and running into the village to tell everyone she meets about the Messiah is a reversal of her typical actions. She leaves behind her ostracism and her marginalization when she boldly starts talking to villagers about this unusual man sitting at the well. She shows no sign of fear. Jesus' conversation with her has effected a change in her. Dare we say that Jesus' conversation with her is the basis of a new birth—just as was emphasized in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? I would say "yes."

The striking point in this passage is that if the woman's fundamental challenge was that she was barren, her invitation and the subsequent response of the villagers demonstrates a birth: a birth of new believers. The last verse of the Scripture reading says,

"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."

"The Savior of the world." This is one of the rare times in the gospel that Jesus is labelled as the Savior, Savior of the world. The use of this word falls on the heels of John 3:16-17. God so loved "the world." Which leads to John 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." So that the world might be saved. Jesus "had to go through Samaria." Another way to say that sentence is "It was necessary for Jesus to go through Samaria." Why?

Because Jesus knew that the reason that God sent him to earth was so that the whole entire world might be saved through him. That includes the Samaritans, who, from a Jewish point of view were NOT worthy of being saved. The story of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well is placed here in the gospel to demonstrate exactly what is intended by the phrase in John 3:17 "the whole world."

I conclude with a quote that I had never heard until this past Friday. I'm kind of forcing it into this sermon. But it's too good not to share. "During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was asked if God was on his side. [The President responded,] "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side," said the President, "my greatest concern is to be on God's side."

It was necessary for Jesus to go to Samaria so that he could interact with a lone woman at a well. Through that interaction an

ⁱ Lewis, Karoline M. John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary, Fortress Press, Mpls, 2014. Pages 64-65.

entire village heard and came to believe in Jesus as the messiah; in Jesus as the Savior of the world. The woman at the well was on God's side.

Through this woman's interaction with Jesus she is given the gift of a new birth. She is reborn. She becomes a believer in the Savior of the world. Through the villager's interactions with Jesus they are reborn. They become believers in the Savior of the world. Through our interactions with Jesus we are given the gift of a new birth. Through God's power we are reborn. The woman acted in a manner demonstrating that she was "on God's side." My question for you today is, "Are you acting in a manner demonstrating that you are "on God's side?" Amen.

"What does Christ's calling mean for us? With whom will we stand in solidarity? During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was asked if God was on his side. "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side," said the President, "my greatest concern is to be on God's side." To be on God's side may not show up in our bank accounts or raise our status in the eyes of this world, but we can trust Jesus' word that we are and forever will be blessed."ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ Stephen Pera, God Pause Devotions Luther Seminary Friday, January 30, 2026