

## "Following Jesus"

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Portions contributed by [Kenneth Sauer](#)

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Exodus 17:1-7

John 4:4-30, 39-42

I am in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year of being Pastor here at Newaygo United Methodist Church. Which that means you all have put up with me for nearly 3 years now!!! I'd say, that's amazing, and thank you. In all seriousness though, there are real positive things about serving an active church in the same community.

For one thing, we have gotten to know one another...pretty well. I trust you. I know you. I think you trust me. You can't help but know what makes me tick by now. We love each other. And, how couldn't we?

We have been, and still are, involved in front line ministry together—ministry to help the homeless, the least, the lost. It's amazing stuff.

Another cool thing about pastoring the same church, is that you really get to know the community.

For instance, so often, when I see some folks walking up and down our streets, I recognize them as someone who has been ministered to by this church. I sometimes know them by name. I know some of the things they are going through in life. I know a bit of their story.

Perhaps they join us for a great meal at our Saturday morning breakfast. They might come by for a helping hand, or we have put them up in a hotel room or have helped them in some other ways...like sharing a friendly smile during Christmas walk, treated them and their children respectfully at one of our kids days. And, like I have told you through conversations with them, they are getting to know us as well.

That doesn't mean that they necessarily come and worship with us—but wouldn't it be great—but they know this is a church that accepts them for who they are. They know we are here, if and when they need us. They know we love them.

This is a place that Jesus does ministry out of, because...because...Jesus is doing ministry through all of you!!! I hope people know...that it is my prayer that this community will know more and more and more that they are not here for us, but that we are here for them!!!

You folks proven over and over again that everyone is welcome in this congregation—and everyone is more than welcome to become as involved in the ministries of this church as they would like...and whoever becomes involved will be loved, treated with dignity—they will fit right in.

That's what ministry in Christ's Church is supposed to look like. This church has to continue to be involved in its community. We have to reach out. You know why? Because that's what Jesus does. And we are followers of Jesus.

(Pause)

As we follow Jesus in John Chapter 4 this morning we come face to face with a person in great need. And Jesus reaches out to this person. Jesus offers this person new life. Jesus calls this person. And His call changes not only her life, but the lives of nearly everyone in her town.

But you know what, by the cultural standards of His day—Jesus shouldn't have even been at Jacob's well in Samaria on that hot day.

Of course, our Gospel Reading begins with this: **“Jesus had to go through Samaria...”** And that is only because Jesus is God. And well, God is Love. And God goes where there are people who need Him.

Most Jews went “around Samaria”—they didn’t go through it. Samaria was a dangerous place. Jews were hated there. Samaritans were apt to mug them, attack them or worse if they walked into their territory and along their streets. And Jews didn’t like Samaritans either.

The two races hated each other. So, in spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Jesus **“had to go through Samaria.”**

Is there any place you have to go through even though you could more easily avoid it, go around it or completely ignore it?

Growing up in Muskegon, I heard quite often of the dangers in the Muskegon Heights area, especially when it got dark out. I met a pastor friend who made it a point to go and walk the streets of the Muskegon Hts. area, and more so after hearing a report of a shooting.

I thought that he was just crazy or had a death wish. That is until I sat down with him and started hearing the stories that he had of lives that he had touched. Stories of young men and women, through his love for them, changed the course of their future because he showed them that someone cared.

Now, I didn’t start walking the streets at night with him, but we did see a need to volunteer at the Supper House, feeding up to 200 individuals with a hot meal at Trinity United Methodist Church.

The thing is, we can’t change lives, we can’t direct others paths, unless we go there ourselves. And as we do...we find Jesus is there with us.

(pause)

When Jesus got to the city of Sychar, He felt tired and sat down near a source of water called Jacob’s well. It was the middle of the day—when the sun was the hottest—and a woman came out to get some water.

This was actually an unusual thing. Because you see, most people would go get water in the morning or in the evening rather than in the heat of the day. But here she was. And she was all alone.

Where were her friends? Where were the other women from town? Could it be that this woman lived on the margins? Could it be that she was an outcast? Could it be that she was the person that everyone else in town gossiped about, laughed at, scoffed at? Was she bullied by her peers?

Over and over again, we see Jesus searching and finding those who are the outcasts, the marginalized, the folks who most people don't want to associate with. And what Jesus does when He finds these folks, is He invites them into a relationship—He offers them hope, love and a new life!!!

The Samaritan Woman at the well must have been really startled or shocked to see a man at the well that day, and not only a man—but a Jewish man!!! It's likely that she had spent her life being used by men.

One of her thoughts may have been: "Oh No, here's another man coming to take something from me. Why else would he be here?" Perhaps that is why she seems so astonished that all Jesus does is ask her for water.

Now, the rule of social behavior didn't jive with men having a conversation with a woman. I know it's a bit hard to relate to in this day and age, but in Jesus' day women were the property of men.

It was accepted far and wide that having a conversation with a woman was a "waste of time," and there was a contemporary debate between men as to whether or not women even had souls. To top this off, of course, is the fact that Jesus was a Jew and the Woman at the Well was a Samaritan.

Verses 7 and 9 read: **“Jesus said to her, ‘Give me some water to drink.’”** ...**“The Samaritan woman asked, ‘Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’”** (Jews and Samaritans didn’t associate with each other.)

And then Jesus does something even more remarkable—He suggests that she should be asking Him for a drink. He says that if she were to do so, He would give her **“living water.”**

Of course, that kind of freaks her out. Do you know the literal meaning of **“living water?”** Living water is running water, like in a brook or river. It’s fresh water—it’s teeming with life.

The water in the well was not **“living water.”** It was stagnant water. So, the Samaritan woman probably thought Jesus was some kind of a kook when He offered her living water.

**“Sir...”** she politely and perhaps cautiously says, **“Where would you get this living water? You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us...”**

Then Jesus continues to offer her this different kind of water—living water that will **“become a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.”**

Of course, Jesus is not talking about water at all. And the woman doesn’t know this at the moment. What Jesus is talking about, is the Holy Spirit. Jesus is talking about a spring which takes root in the soul of a person, bringing them salvation...not only in this life...but also in the life to come.

It gives people the strength, not only to get outside of the shell that has imprisoned them...it also provides us with the resources we need in order to minister to other people—to take food to the homeless, to love the unloved, to live this life to the full, to share the Good News of the Kingdom.

And although the woman doesn't understand exactly what Jesus is talking about or Who He is—she asks Him: **“Sir, give me this water.”**

Jesus initiated a relationship with a woman from an enemy race...a woman who had probably never met someone—especially a man--who just wanted to be with her for her—not for some ulterior motive...not for what He could get from her...and He let her know that He knew her completely...sins, mistakes, warts, things she was ashamed of—and He loved her just the same.

She had never experienced such a wonderful thing.

First she calls Jesus a prophet. And then, following a pretty in-depth theological conversation—the woman says **“I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ.”**

And when Jesus tells her that He is the Christ and He has arrived, her moment of revelation and transformation takes place!!! She immediately puts down her water jar—no longer caring why she had gone to the well in the first place. All her priorities change.

She finds a new reason for her life and a new mission and she rushes back to the city where she has been so abused and ostracized—no longer concerned about what the people think or say about her. And after the woman goes telling everyone she can find about this Christ at the well—**“the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them...”**

He stayed for two days, and **“many more believed because of his word,”** exclaiming: **“this [man] is truly the savior of the world.”**

You see, that is what happens when Jesus offers and we drink His **“Living Water.”** It bubbles up to eternal life!!!

As followers of Christ, we are called to take the time to get to know people...not pre-judge them. We are called to break down the barriers—not build more. We are called to be Christ to this world—to this city no matter their race, class or social standing...no matter how

sinful we may perceive them to be...and in doing so we will truly be living what we pray...that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As we come together with God and one another, let us remember who we are and Who we are called to follow.

And in following, may we leave this place with a renewed sense of our need to reach out in love and mission to the people of this community who so need to know that Jesus loves them.

He has not forgotten them. And neither have we. **Amen!!!**