



Pastor Michael O'Neill
March 19, 2017

Ashes to Fire, Week 3
With Jesus at a Well
John 4:4-24

1. Jesus had to be there...

- 1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10; 2 Kings 17:24-41; Ezra 4:1-24

2. To meet a hurting person...

3. Who was hungry for God,

4. Met him,

5. And introduced him to her neighbors!

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



3/19/17
West Valley Church
Michael O'Neill

A2F: With Jesus at a Well
Ashes to Fire, Year A
(John 4:4-24)¹

Have you been able to use the “Ashes to Fire” morning and evening meditations? Are you enjoying it? I believe there is something powerful that can happen in our church when we are all reading the same Scripture passages each day. I believe it gives the Holy Spirit a profound platform from which to speak to our entire church, to help us be united in heart and mind and mission, and it allows the Spirit to do a work in our church collectively and to lead us together so that God can do great and supernatural things in us and through us. Each Sunday from now until the day of Pentecost, which is June 4th, our sermon focus will be the Scripture readings for each Sunday of “Ashes to Fire.”

Our reading for today is, like last week, another conversation between a person and Jesus. Just as we saw last week, John is writing in a way that takes us into the conversation, and allows us to understand where each person is coming from and what their mindset is, and allows us to come to the same conclusions that they come to. The passage is in John 4:4-24, when Jesus talked with a woman at a well. This is an amazing story of one encounter that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman that turned out to be life changing not only for her, but for most in her entire community. Let me set the stage for this story before we look at it. Jesus and the disciples are traveling north from Judea to Galilee, and they go through Samaritan country. This was not something Jews would ever do, because they considered Samaritans horrible people who were unclean and should be avoided at all costs. I'll explain why in a bit. It is the middle of the day; the desert sun is at its hottest. Jesus is tired from the journey, and goes to a well, and waits – as if for an appointment of some kind. He has nothing with which to draw water from the well. A woman shows up, and he asks her for a drink. She recognizes by the way he's dressed that he's a Jew, and she knows that they don't associate with each other. She's taken aback; nonetheless they have a conversation together that is very intriguing. As is typical for Jesus, he gets to the heart of the matter very quickly. It appears that this is not a chance encounter at a well after all, but instead a divine appointment, and Jesus' main concern is the heart and soul of this outcast woman.

You may have found the passage in your Bibles, and I'll encourage you to keep it open in front of you. But instead of reading it to you, I want you to watch a clip from a film called “The Gospel of John.” This clip does an excellent job of capturing the

¹ Primary resources are “*Reel to Real, Episode 2*,” Michael W. O'Neill, 2/13/11; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Rev. and updated., vol. 1, The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, ID: Welseyean Publishing House, 1997), and *Faithlife Study Bible*, Lexham Press,.

playful exchange between them in their conversation (which is in the original language but gets lost in our translations), it shows the astonishment of the woman, and the calm confidence and love of Jesus. As you watch this, remember that John wants us to see the ways that Jesus and the woman are thinking and where they are coming from, so keep that in mind and let's see what we will discover.

Play video

Allow me to highlight just some of what John intended us to understand about this passage when he wrote it:

1. Jesus ***had*** to be ***there***...

Right at the beginning of the story, we are told that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. So you might think that is because it was the only way to get to Galilee. But that's not true. The shortest route from Judea to Galilee *was* right through Samaria. That trip would take about three days. But in order to steer clear of the filthy Samaritans, Jews would turn east across the Jordan River, travel until they were past Samaria, then turn back west across the river. That trip would take twice as long—six days—and yet that was the route the Jews would always take, just to keep from having anything to do with Samaritans.

Both Samaritans and Jews claimed the same spiritual lineage, the same Scriptures (though Samaritans only used the first five books of the Old Testament and none of the others – Psalms, Proverbs, the prophets, Judges, etc.) They both had the same way to approach worship (Temple worship according to the prescripts of Moses). So like feuding brothers, these things they had in common seemed only to intensify their centuries-old hatred of each other.

The split came with the division of the twelve tribes of Israel into the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms (1 Kings 12, 2 Chronicles 10) in about 930 B.C. Samaritans as a people came from the mixture of the Northern Israelites with various foreign kingdoms, after they were overtaken by the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 17:24–41). This mixture of races led to the contamination of Israel's religion and further disregard for God and his ways among those ten tribes. During the reconstruction of Jerusalem and its Temple (under Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel and others in the sixth century B.C.), the Samaritans may have joined with others in trying to block this rebuilding (see Ezra 4:1–24). There were several other incidents, but by the time Jesus had this conversation, this feud had been going on for over 750 years – deeply entrenched in both Jewish and Samaritan cultures; both cultures hated each other. But we are told that Jesus *had* to go to Samaria.

Jesus and the disciples were not in a hurry, so it's not like they *had* to take the shortest route. But Jesus and his disciples still took the route right through Samaria. That wasn't because he wanted to make the trip shorter; it was because there was something Jesus *had* to do. Going through Samaria was an important part of his mission. And it started with meeting this woman. You see, Jesus *had* to be there...

2. To *meet* a *hurting* person...

I can't adequately describe how much of an outcast this woman was, but I'll give you a snapshot: first, she was a woman in a culture that considered women at best lower than dogs and at worst, merely property. Even worse yet, she was a Samaritan woman.

She came to this particular well in the middle of the day, instead of the morning or evening, when other women would draw water. This meant she was probably even shunned by other women. We know this too, because there was also a well that she could've gone to in her hometown that was closer than this one.

We also find out what kind of person she was – she had been married and divorced five times; not exactly a track record of successful relationships. In that culture, women could not divorce, but men could divorce women with a glance. This woman had married, had hopes of being loved, and had been rejected five times. Or, maybe she was so difficult to live with, that five different men threw her out. And now she was just living with a guy. This woman was hurting terribly inside, no matter what she looked like from the outside, and no matter how justified others were in condemning her. She was lonely, hurting, had no self-worth, and had no hope of ever having a family or even being loved by a man or by her community.

As she and Jesus are having this conversation, Jesus reveals that he is aware of these relationship failures. There was no way Jesus could have known that about her; he'd never met her before. There was no such thing as Facebook where Jesus could've trolled her page and found these things out. The only way he could have known this about her was if God had revealed it him, which helps us see why Jesus *had* to go to Samaria and meet this hurting person...

3. Who was *hungry* for *God*,

When Jesus revealed these hidden parts of her story, and showed that he understood her pain, she realized that he must be a man who is very close to God because only God could've revealed these things. But the conversation might be getting too personal for her, so she maneuvers a conversational diversion by bringing up the issue of worship. She right away changes the subject to religion. The Samaritans believed the true Temple was there in Samaria, while the Jews believed it was in Jerusalem. Changing the subject helped take the spotlight off herself and her sin, but it also revealed her genuine hunger for God. There is genuineness to her seeking. She wants to know from Jesus the best way to worship God, since Jesus seems to have an inside track with God. Inside her hurting heart is a hunger for a God who loves her. She reveals her own anticipation that someday the Messiah would arrive and he would set everything straight. Her own heart-hurt revealed her hunger for the Messiah. She didn't even have a correct understanding of who God was or who the Messiah would be – her own Samaritan religion had misled her – but still, she mentioned her longing for the Messiah and then, to her astonishment, she...

4. **Met him,**

Jesus had to be there to meet a hurting person who was hungry for God, and he introduced himself to her. Think about it: here is something really amazing and powerful and scandalous – this sinful Samaritan adulteress was *the very first person* that Jesus chose to reveal who he was. Up to this point he had not told anyone that he was the Messiah. To this mistress he said, “I am the Messiah.” To this Samaritan woman he said, “I am the savior of the world.” No longer would there be walls of judgment and prejudice built between people, whether figuratively or physically. From now on, it wasn’t “those who were God’s people” and “those who were not.” It wasn’t “men are good and women are lowly.” It wasn’t good people vs. sinful people. By revealing himself first to this woman, Jesus was saying that *everyone* could be God’s child! The old religion was a seedbed for racial and political prejudice and discrimination. The Messiah would be the savior of the *entire* world. Jesus said to the Jews,

“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”
(John 10:16, niv)

Jesus was *intentionally inclusive*. Jesus came for everyone. That’s why *we* are never to judge others or be prejudiced against others. Instead of walls to keep people out, the Kingdom of God opens doors to welcome everyone in.

She essentially said to Jesus, “All I know is, I can’t wait for the Messiah to come!” To which Jesus said, literally, “*I am*, the one speaking to you, *I am*.” And she realized that Jesus is the I AM—YHWH, the Messiah. And the change in her is amazing—she couldn’t help but run right out...

5. And **introduced him to her neighbors!**

She ran to tell everyone in her town – the very ones that rejected her, she now ran to tell about Jesus. And as a result, her entire community believed in Jesus, and Jesus stayed with them for two days teaching them. They finally said to the woman, “We no longer believe because you told us; we have seen him and believe it for ourselves.” (That’s toward the end of the chapter).

That’s what happens in the lives of people who encounter Jesus. In the midst of their parched life of pain and broken relationships and sin, Jesus brings in life-giving water. Jesus himself pours healing water into our dried, cracked, gaping wounds. Jesus himself reveals the love of God the Father for us. That’s why worship is central to this conversation; the focal point of worship is God the Father. He initiates this relationship because he loves us so much. So He is the object of our worship and he is the one who is seeking worshippers – people who will experience his love and respond to it. Too often, we want worship to be about *us*—*we* want to get

something out of it, we want to feel better, we want to be blessed. But it's not about us—it's about God. We worship *HIM*.

But notice something: at the same time, the Father is seeking *you*. The word Jesus used for the Father's "seeking" worshippers means that he *eagerly* searches for *you*. God is not waiting for you to stumble and find your way to Him—he is seeking *you*; he is *seeking* you! Jesus *has* to come your way to meet you because the Father has given him that assignment, that appointment with you. Jesus comes to you in all of your pain and hurting and sin, and has the answer for your deep down thirst for a God who will love you and accept you and heal you.

He will reveal himself to you. And when he does, you'll be so excited that you can't wait to introduce others to him, too. You see the Father has people that he *has* to send *you* to – to introduce *them* to Jesus.

Have you met Jesus? He's waiting for you, just like he waited at that well. He knows you very, very well. He knows all your screw-ups, your brokenness, he knows all your rejection and all the times you've driven people away. He knows your deep down hunger for a right and real relationship with God. He'll reveal himself to you. And when he does, you'll find that God has appointments for you to keep so you can introduce others to Jesus, too.

pray

I find it interesting that the passage we are on today revolves around this metaphor of water for the Spirit of God and our relationship with him; our thirst and need for it, its healing and cleansing and refreshing power, and our need to take that life-giving metaphor of water to others.

It's interesting because two weeks ago, after we had such a great time in baptism, we had several other people who said they, too, needed to be baptized. And we didn't want to wait to do it; I think of the man in Acts 8 who accepted Christ and basically said, "Here's some water - what can stand in the way of my being baptized?" We didn't want to waste any time. So we are going to conclude our service today with baptism. We have five people that are prepared to be baptized today, and so I'd like to ask them to come forward. We will make our faith declaration together, then we will go get ready.

Baptism Liturgy

Baptism is the sign and seal of the new covenant of grace, the significance of which is attested by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans as follows:

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death: in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5).

The earliest and simplest statement of Christian belief, into which you now come to be baptized, is the Apostles' Creed. I'd like to ask all those who have been baptized to read this with me, please. Soon, those of you who are being baptized will join these who are affirming their baptism declaration of faith, which reads as follows (again, all those who have been baptized, let's read this aloud together):

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

"And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Church of Jesus Christ, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Will you be baptized into this faith? If so, answer, "I will."

Response: I will.

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you realize that He saves you now?

Response: I do.

Will you obey God's holy will and keep His commandments, walking in them all the days of your life?

Response: I will.

Amen!

We are going to go prepare.