

Truly the Savior of the World
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John 4:5-42

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The 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.) ¹⁰Jesus 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.' ¹¹The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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.' ¹⁵The 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.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

²⁷ 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?' ²⁸Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' ³²But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' ³³So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' ³⁴Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do 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. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They 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 woman and the man are sitting in adjoining seats on the New York subway, not “riding together” but riding together as those who ride the subway do. Someone is filming his ride and the woman leans in and asks, “Are you famous?” He replies, “Yes. Not very famous, you don’t know me. But I’ll get there some day. My name is Jay, what’s your name?” She tells him, “Ellen. What do you do?” “I make music,” he says. She asks, “Did you just do a performance?” “I’m on my way to the performance in Brooklyn. At the new Brooklyn arena,” he says. “Fabulous,” she responds. He says, “I performed eight shows, actually.” “Already?” “This is the last show.” “And you’re going by subway?” “Yes.” “I’m proud of you. Say your name again, just so I get it...” “Jay. Jay-Z.” “Oh, you’re Jay-Z! I know about Jay-Z.”¹

If you’re not familiar, Jay-Z is a media mogul, making music and producing that of many others, and he’s otherwise known as the husband of Beyoncé, who performed the half-time show at the 2013 Super Bowl. To be clear, I am **not** saying Jay-Z is a modern-day Jesus; the honesty of this exchange, however, seems so parallel to our reading from John this morning. Jesus has been teaching all over for some time now and his reputation begins to precede him but not to the point that everyone knows him by sight. The woman on the subway, Ellen Grossman, with her gray hair pulled back into a clip, is a visual artist and a listener of jazz, by appearances not one for whom Jay-Z’s rap genre would likely be readily familiar. The woman at the well is a Samaritan, whom we already know from the Good Samaritan story has different convictions than the Jews, although from the same origins of faith. She knows by sight only that he is different from her – “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

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.” “*Not very famous, you don’t know me. But I’ll get there some day.*” 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?” “*What do you do?*” Here, our stories diverge.

“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.’” Except that what Jesus said was not “I am he” but “Ἐγώ εἰμι,” “I am.” Just as God said to Moses, “I am who I am. Thus you shall say to the Israelites that ‘I am has sent me to you.’”² “I am” is the name of God for Jews and Samaritans alike. It is no surprise that she went running to her townspeople, telling

¹ <http://www.nowthisnews.com/news/lady-to-jay-z-are-you-famous/>

² Exodus 3:14.

her story and asking, “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” and, in response, “They left the city and were on their way to him.”

Since Ellen’s subway ride with Jay-Z, she’s been invited to review an album of his and give her thoughts on air. I’m willing to bet that, even before that, Ellen went home and did some research on Jay-Z, asking others about him, certainly telling others of her experience, probably with a measure of excitement. I was fortunate enough to meet Jimmy Buffett years ago and, so impacted by his humble and down-to-earth personality, I told everyone about him, not only fans. We like celebrities who are “just like us,” who sign books for your kid as “the other James William,” who ride subways; when we hear about them, we tend to seek them out, to learn more, to follow them because of the good things we’ve heard. I can say for certain that I have a new measure of respect for Jay-Z and will pay attention to the things he does in the future, hoping they all measure up to the good first impression.

“Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony...So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word.” It is my hope that you leave every encounter with Christ, with his word, excited and wanting to share it with others. I know the reality is that we take them, both Christ and his word, for granted. We are not surprised by the goodness of Christ, by his “just like us” qualities, or even by the words of challenge he presents to us. We’ve lost the excitement, if we ever even had it. If you grew up in the faith, you heard the stories first and understood them later so they were familiar before they could be surprising.

What does he say to us today? “Look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting...I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” Then, he spoke of the prophets who had come before and of the many faithful Jews who had told of the goodness of God. This is what they sowed – the good news. The disciples were being called to bring even more good news to the people, in fact they could bring the people to the good news himself. Around them, literally in Samaria and figuratively in the Jews who had been told the law was the truest way to God, were their fields ready for harvesting. Now, to us, the message is that there are people around us who have not heard, who have forgotten, who need to know the goodness of God’s love. These are certainly challenging words for us. It’s easier to talk about this great thing Jay-Z did, this great thing Donald Driver did, this great thing anyone else did, than to talk about the great things Jesus has done, the great things God is continuing to do.

What can we learn from the Samaritan woman? She didn’t have the law memorized or talk at length about the prophets; she told those she met of her encounter with Jesus. That’s all. The story was easy to tell because it’s the story she knew best. When is the time you knew God was with you? What

can you look back on and say “God was working in the midst of the tough times”? What is **your** story? Telling it is what Jesus asks. There are so many who could use the good news of **your** life. If you don’t share it, how can any come to you, saying, “It is no longer because of what you have said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world”?

Let us pray: Lord and living water, grant us excitement in your word and courage to share our own stories, we pray. Amen.

2 MINUTES FOR QUIET REFLECTION