

The Jesus Way / **THE WAY OF FAITH**
Water Jars
John 4:4-42

I don't suppose it really looked like this. [Display urn] This one is much too ornate and too breakable to serve as the water jar carried by the woman-at-the-well. You may have heard about her. If you've read through the Gospel of John, you've encountered her along the path that Jesus walked. But have you really seen her? And, in seeing her, have you seen yourself in her?

Maybe you think Jesus is too important to notice you. Maybe you think he is too righteous to be a friend to you, a sinner. Maybe you think Jesus is too "in" to care about someone on the "outs" like you. Maybe you think that. Maybe you're wrong.

Even though I've thought those things about myself—that I am too insignificant, too sinful—for Jesus to care about me, I have been wrong. Jesus does care; Jesus does love me. And it makes me love him back.

When Jesus boldly strode through history, leaving footprints in the Gospels, he showed us what kind of person he was. Or, is. For as Hebrews 13 reminds us, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever." If we could, therefore, see in the Gospel narratives how Jesus related to people like us, we would have a clue as to how he would, how he does, relate to you and me. Will he notice me? Will he sympathize with my struggles? Will he care about me, even though I have been rejected by others? Will he care about my response to him?

As we have sung already today and will see in his dealing with the woman-at-the-well, Jesus will "Break Through" to meet us in our need, to break through the pain, to break through the guilt and the shame.

**When Jesus reaches out (vs. 3-9)
and offers us what we need (vs. 10-15),
rather than constructing obstacles (vs. 16-25),
we can respond to Christ (vs. 26-42).**

A. When Jesus reaches out... 4:3-9.

³When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)

There were two reasons this woman was initially astonished he would strike up a conversation with her. First, she was a Samaritan and he was a Jew. The Jews had a long-standing, deep-seated hatred for the Samaritans. Why? It started over 700 years earlier when the nation of Israel was taken into captivity into Babylon. Not all of the people were taken away to Babylon. Some were left behind. And after the Babylonians moved many of the Israelites out, they then moved other conquered people groups in. During the 70 years of captivity those Israelites left behind intermarried with these new people groups brought in. The result was a mixed blood race, part Jew and part Gentile. To make matters worse this race of half-breeds also practiced a blended form of the Jewish religion. They only accepted the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible written by Moses) as Scripture. They built a separate place of worship on their own, nearby Mount Gerizim. And then they blended in elements of the pagan religions from these other people groups. Samaritans—and all they stood for racially, culturally, religiously—were offensive to devout Jews. That’s why, when Jesus, speaking to a Jewish audience, wanting to press home the need to be compassionate to whoever is in need, to answer the fault-finding question, “And who is my neighbor?,” told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Most good Jews, going from Jerusalem to Galilee or from Galilee to Jerusalem, even avoided going through Samaria. You can see from this map, that the “normal” route taken by Jews avoided Samaria by following the Jordan River Valley. But Jesus’ path took him right through the heart of Samaria, to the town of Sychar. Verse 4 actually says, “He had to go through Samaria.” He didn’t have to go through, as if there were no other routes. He “had to go through” because there was a ministry encounter waiting for him there among people Jesus loved.

Maybe you think you’re lineage—ethnically, culturally, ancestrally—has caused people to be prejudiced against you or even persecute you. Let me tell you, Jesus doesn’t feel that way about you. He doesn’t feel that way about anyone.

To Jesus, each one is special. He knows all about you. He even knows your name and can distinguish every one of you from every other one of you.

“Too Many Daves,” by Dr. Seuss

Did I ever tell you that Mrs. McCave
Had twenty-three sons and she named them all Dave?
Well, she did. And that wasn’t a smart thing to do.
You see, when she wants one and calls out, “Yoo-Hoo!
Come into the house, Dave!” she doesn’t get one.
All twenty-three Daves of her come on the run!
This makes things quite difficult at the McCaves’
As you can imagine, with so many Daves.
And often she wishes that, when they were born,
She had named one of them Bodkin Van Horn
And one Putt-Putt. Another one Moon Face.
Another one Marvin O’Gravel Balloon Face.
And one of them Ziggy. And one Soggy Muff.
One Buffalo Bill. And one Biffalo Buff.
And one of them Zanzibar Buck-Buck McFate...
But she didn’t do it. And now it’s too late.

God know each of us individually. He knows your name, how many hairs are on your head, and all the days that are ordained for you are already written in his book. Jesus' love for the world is not just general; it is specific. He loves you.

Well, Jesus walks right into this hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, sits down and engages in conversation with a Samaritan who was a woman. That's the second reason she was amazed. Men of that time considered women to be beneath them. Unfortunately, in some cultures and even some households, that unbiblical position still is practiced.

But Jesus never looked down upon women. On the contrary, he went out of his way to teach them, cure their sicknesses, receive ministry from them, and in this case, initiate dialog with them.

This amazed the Samaritan woman. *"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"*

B. ...and offers us what we need,... 4:10-15

Instead of answering her directly, Jesus shifts the focus of her amazement up a level. He says, ¹⁰*"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

The really amazing thing is not that he asked her for a drink, but that she didn't ask him! He has "living water" and he calls it the "gift of God."

But the woman doesn't rise very high. She simply says, ¹¹*"Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"* ¹²*"Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"*

She is not on Jesus' wavelength yet. So Jesus again lifts the level of amazement. ¹³*"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The amazing thing is not that he can give her water without a bucket, but that his water satisfies forever. And even more, your soul becomes a spring. This miracle water buries itself in a sandy soul and bubbles up a spring of life.

What does this mean? The closest parallel to the image of a soul becoming a spring is John 7:37-39:

"Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive."

--John 7:37-39

So the water Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit. The presence of God's Spirit in your life takes away the frustrated soul-thirst and turns you into a fountain.

But again the woman misses the point. She cannot rise above her five senses. *"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

The woman did not like coming here to draw water. Not only was it an arduous chore—can you imagine how harder your life would be if you had no running water in your house to do your dishes, bathe your kids, flush your toilet, or quench your thirst? But this particular woman may have hated facing accusing stares and gossipy whispers of the other women whenever she came to draw water in the cool of the morning or evening. So she came in the 6th hour of the day, that is, Noon, when the sun was hottest, but the whisperers were fewest. Thinking only of physical water and her own convenience, she wants the water Jesus as living water.

Beware of giving up on people too soon. Jesus has set his saving sights on this woman. He aims to create a worshiper of God "in spirit and truth" out of her still.

So now he touches the most sensitive and vulnerable spot in her life: *"Go, call your husband and come back."* The quickest way to the heart is through a wound. Why does Jesus strip open this woman's inner life like this? Because he had said in John 3:20, "Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed." Concealed sin keeps us from seeing the light of Christ. The first step to dealing with sin is admitting it. Stepping out of denial, one exposes the sin to the light of truth and the fresh air of sanity. By his question, Jesus encourages her to confront her past and her present. Christ lays bare her spiritual state.

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C. ...rather than constructing obstacles,... 4:16-25

Obstacle #1: Avoid admitting our _____ (sin), 16-18.

¹⁷"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

Now watch the universal reflex of a person trying to avoid conviction. She has to admit that he has extraordinary insight.

Obstacle #2: Engage in _____ (theological) debate, 19-24

¹⁹“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.”

But instead of going the direction Jesus pointed, she tries to switch over to an academic controversy: ²⁰*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.*” What is your position on this theological issue? A trapped animal will chew off its own leg to escape. A trapped sinner will mangle her own conscience and rip up the rules of logic: “Why, yes, as long as we are talking about my adultery, what is your stance on the issue of where people should worship?” This is standard evasive double-talk for trapped sinners.

But the great Soul-Hunter is not so easily eluded. He does not insist she stay on his path. He will follow her into the bush since it too is a discussion leading to the confrontation of spiritual need. She raised the issue of **where** people ought to worship. Jesus responds by saying, “That controversy can’t compare in importance with the issue of **how** and **whom** you worship.”

²¹*Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.*

In other words, don’t get bogged down in unessential controversies of where. It is possible to worship God in vain both in your place and in ours! Did not God say to the Jews, “*This people honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me*” in Isaiah 29:13? The issue is not where, but **how**.

Then he rivets her attention on **whom**. ²²*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*

These are harsh words. But when life and death are at stake there comes a point when you put the matter bluntly—like telling a person with lung disease to stop smoking.

The Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except their own version of the first five books. Their knowledge of God was deficient. Therefore, Jesus tells her that Samaritan worship is deficient. It matters whether you know the One you worship!

How and whom are crucial, not where. Worship must be vital and real in the heart, and worship must rest on a true perception of God. There must be spirit and there must be truth. So Jesus says, ²³*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.* ²⁴*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*”

Worshiping in spirit is the opposite of worshiping in merely external ways. It is the opposite of empty formalism and traditionalism. Worshiping in truth is the opposite of worship based on an inadequate view of God. Worship must have heart and head. Worship must engage emotions and thought.

Obstacle #3: Put off a _____ (decision) until later, 25.

²⁵ *"I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

D. ...we can respond to Christ. 26-28.

²⁶*Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

There came a time in this woman's life when she had the opportunity to respond to Jesus as the Messiah-Christ. There comes a time in your life when you too can chose.

²⁷*Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"* ²⁸*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,* ²⁹*"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* ³⁰*They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

[³¹*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."* ³²*But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."* ³³*Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"* ³⁴*"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* ³⁵*Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.* ³⁶*Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.* ³⁷*Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.* ³⁸*I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."]*

³⁹*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."* ⁴⁰*So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.* ⁴¹*And because of his words many more became believers.*

⁴²*They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."*

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You know there are no wasted words in Scripture. Did you notice a particular detail in verse 28? It is a detail that indicates this woman-at-the-well, this Samaritan, this sinner was responding to Christ's offer. Do you see the phrase in verse 28 that indicates she is responding to the offer of Jesus the Christ?

²⁸*Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town*

"Leaving her water jar." Why did she leave her water jar?

1. She wanted to go unhindered.

“The urgency of the great message” compelled her to go unhindered. She couldn’t carry a heavy jar well and make haste. As Hebrews 12:1-2 says, we must lay aside every weight that slows us down in running the race set before us. We have such an important message to share with those who are “missing.” Dennis Blevins recently suggested—and I agree—that a better term for those who do not know our Savior is not “lost” but “missing.” Yes, they are lost, but our heart needs to think of them as “missing.” When you see a poster of a dog on a telephone pole or the photo of a child on a milk carton, they are described as “missing” because that implies people who care about them are searching. We are searching for our friends to be found. We must go unhindered. (Easter Sunday School dismissal April 12th).

2. She forgot it.

In the excitement of finding some who treated her with respect and promised her living water, and said he was the Messiah and gave all the evidences of being such, she forgot it. She forgot what had been necessary morning, noon, and night because of the “expulsive power of something greater.” We have seen the expulsive power of Christ at work in the lives of people who have met Christ—sometimes instantaneously, and more often gradually.

(Example of Dave, a high school camper who was observed by another camper on Monday to have cigarettes in his suitcase; Dave received the Lord on Tuesday evening; on Thursday a camper came to me as their cabin counselor to nark on Dave’s contraband; I confronted Dave. “All right, I know you’ve got cigarettes in your suitcase. Give them over.” Dave replied, “Can’t do it. On Tuesday I received the Lord, and on Wednesday I flushed them down the toilet.”)

3. She left it as a sign she would return.

If one wants to know if his wife has just left the room or gone on home, what do you men do? You, of course, look for her purse. If she has left her purse beside her seat, you know she’ll be back soon. Hover near her purse, and you will soon see her again. Maybe that is what the Samaritan woman was doing. This woman-at-the-well left her water jar as a statement, “I’ll be back. Don’t go away. I’ll be back, but not alone, so please wait for me.”

4. She thought the Lord might want to use it.

After all, she realized Jesus never did get that water he asked her for in the first place. Here she had to leave as the disciples were coming, but she wanted what she had to be of service to him. Whatever it is—in this case a jar—she wanted to place before him to use as he wanted.

So which is the reason you’d leave a water jar behind today? In you mind’s eye, I want each of us to picture having a water jar like this one in your arms. If you are going to leave it behind today, what will it represent? Why are you leaving it?

1. Does your left-behind water pot represent your wanting to **go unhindered**. You want to lay aside every weight that would slow your ability to say to your friends, “Look. Is not this the

Christ?” If so, in your mind’s eye, take your imaginary water jar and slide it under the pew right between your feet. In doing so, you are saying to God in the chapel of your spirit, help me to lay aside the things that slow me down in my pursuit of you and testimony to others.

2. Is it because **you forgot it**? The expulsive power of something greater—Jesus Himself—has made you willing to lay down that habit, that hindrance, that you thought was necessary but isn’t. If there is an area of your life you want to leave behind, through confession and repentance to God, let it go. As a response to the Holy Spirit’s prompting in your heart, will you in your mind’s eye, let your water jar represent that area of your life you want to leave behind and forget?

3. Do you want to leave behind your water pot as a sign **you will return**. You crave the words of the Savior. They are living words of truth. Jesus says, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” You are still seeking. You will be back for another dose, another session at the foot of Jesus. You leave the water pot behind as a sign of your teach-ability and openness.

4. Or, do you leave the water pot to represent something you can give that **the Lord might use**. This reminds us of Moses who had only a staff in his hand (Exodus 4:2-4), but when presented before the Lord and endued with His power, it became the rod of God. With the rod of God, he confronted Pharaoh when the staff became a hissing snake (Ex. 7:9-10); with the rod of God, he parted the waters of the sea (Ex. 14:16); with the rod of God, he struck the rock and the water poured forth (Ex. 17:5-6).

The issue is not so much what you have in your hand (whether water jar or shepherd’s crook). The issue is whether it is surrendered for God to use. What’s that in your hand? Maybe it is the credibility you have built as a faithful worker at your job, or the reputation you have in your neighborhood as person friendly to children and teens. What do you have in your hand you can symbolically leave behind for the Lord to use?

In your mind’s eye, take that water jar, and all it represents to you, and slide it under your pew. When you get up to leave later, leave it there.

I can just imagine the scene tonight. It is dark in here. The security system is set, but nothing is activating it. Light from the almost-full-moon is streaming through the slats in the vertical windows. There’s movement over there, and from over there. Who’s here? What are they doing? They are angels and they are collecting water jars left behind earlier in the day at the morning worship service. Will they find yours?

Now I know there aren’t going to be literal water jars left behind today. And there probably won’t be any angelic visitations this evening. Yet, the decisions we make, and the progress we achieve are known by God. And, they are, no doubt, celebrated in heaven. So I ask again, if the angels come to collect the water jars this evening, will they find yours? The answer to that is your decision!