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How to Love a Baby

Scripture: John 4

When I was a fairly young kid, I was playing out in the front yard when a car pulled up in front of my house. There was a young Asian family in the car, and they began motioning for me to come over. Being an innocent child, I didn't even hesitate. I moved to their car so that I could hear what they had to say. They asked me if I could give them directions to some street in the city where I lived. I tried my very best to help them, but being a child, I'm sure I wasn't a great deal of help. But they seemed satisfied with my directions, and they wanted to thank me for my help. So, the young man in the backseat of the car extended a small, collapsible oriental fan through the window of the car. I walked up even closer to the car and took the fan from his hand.

A moment later, I was safely bounding up the steps of my house to show my prize to my mother, and the Asian family was turning the corner, heading for their destination. As I told the story to my mother, she didn't seem all that pleased with my helpfulness or the fan I had received. In fact, even at that I age, I'm sure I detected more than a little worry in her voice as she reminded me that I was not to talk to strangers and I was not to go near a stranger's car and I was not to accept any gift from a stranger.

I'm sure many of you have told your children and grandchildren that they should never talk to strangers, never get in a car with a stranger, and never accept anything from a stranger. I'm sure you also abide by those same mores in daily life. In fact, we have even extended this wise counsel to some of the most innocuous situations, like the elevator. Elevators are generally silent because we are traveling in the presence of strangers.

Jesus, however, didn't follow the rules of Stranger Danger as we read in this passage from the fourth chapter of John.

So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) 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." 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?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty." The 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." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet." The woman said to him, "I know the Messiah is coming. And when he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

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

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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."

Prayer

Babies have a funny influence in our world. Over the years, I've heard several new mothers relay stories of times they've been in the grocery store or pushing a stroller down the street only to have several people come to them, begin admiring their babies, sometimes tickling them under their chins and sometimes without invitation lifting them up and holding them. While I wouldn't recommend doing that to a stranger's baby, it does happen. There is something about babies that calls to us. There is something about them that makes them irresistible. We just want to hold them and love on them and be near them. We just want to love them.

But we don't stay little babies very long. We grow up. Some of us become children who learn to lie and steal. Some of us for whatever reason are always the last picked for the sports teams. Some of us become teenagers who make poor choices in our

relationships and with drugs and alcohol. Some of us for whatever reason never make it in with the more popular crowd. Some of us become adults who continue bad choices and compound them with poor money management. Some of us inherit some of the problems of our parents or grandparents. Some of us just can't seem to get a break. Some of us are labeled as the losers of society, the lowest of the low, the dirty. Gone are the days of the baby, where we are loved and held just because we're a very young child.

The Samaritan woman at the well is just such a woman. Many people like to refer to this scripture and use it to talk about the evils of divorce or the horribly sinful life she leads. Some speculate that this woman is even a prostitute. She is unclean. She is unacceptable. She comes to the city well at noon, when the sun is beating down and the heat of the day is thick. The respected women of the town come to the well either in the early morning or in the evening after the sun has set. It is this practice that led to the expression of the local watering hole and what we now call gathering at the water cooler. The people of the town would come together at these two times to get their water, but almost as important, they could come to fill up on the latest gossip. I'm sure our poor Samaritan woman was the subject of some of that gossip. After all, in a culture that expects marriage and treats woman as property, what's more scandalous than a woman who's been married to five different men and living with another. I'm sure she was the target of much gossip and ridicule. Maybe she stopped going to the well in the morning because she was ashamed, or maybe she stopped going because she was no longer accepted by the other women in the town.

She goes to the well in the heat of the day, hoping not to find anyone there. And to her surprise, there is someone there. As she draws close, she notices that it's a man. In the Middle Eastern culture of the day and in some places still today, it is disgusting, vile for a man to speak to a woman in public. I'm sure she thought the man would move on his way as soon as he saw her. As she drew even closer, she noticed that not only was he a man but he was a Jew. Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. No Jew would have ever associated with a Samaritan unless he had no choice, and they certainly wouldn't have used the same food and water vessels. I'm sure she expected this Jewish man to leave quickly, but he stayed. And as she began to draw water from the well, he even spoke to her, asked her for a drink of water. What a shock that must have been! It was such a shock that she didn't answer whether she would give him water, but instead questioned his very act of speaking to her. How could he? What was wrong with him?

The conversation continues and Jesus offers this woman something even more precious than the water from Jacob's well. It is a living water than will never allow her to be thirsty again. She wants it. She craves it. I don't know why. Maybe she understood what Jesus was truly offering her, the love of God and the forgiveness of sins. Maybe she was just thinking she would never have to return to the well and risk ridicule again.

I don't know what she was thinking, but she wanted the water that this stranger was offering.

And then Jesus opened up her life, and showed her that he knew who she was. He told her that he knew of her past, that he knew everything about her. It's amazing! He knows her sins and her failures and her status as an outcast, and he is still willing to give her grace and love. Jesus knows that she seeks love and acceptance. He knows that she's been looking for it, often in all the wrong places and with all the wrong people. He knows that her husbands haven't loved her. He knows that the people of Sychar haven't loved her. She knows for the first time in her life that someone loves her, someone loves her just like people did when she was a baby. Someone loves her just because she's someone. What that must have felt like to her! She ran into the town, and she shared that good news that she is loved, and the people of the town came out to meet Jesus, the man who loved the outcast.

I wish we all looked at people like we look at babies. I wish we all looked at people the way Jesus saw that woman. He knew her sins, but he saw her as a baby, worthy of love just because she's someone.

How many people do we ignore in our daily lives? How many times have we passed that homeless man, never wanting to make eye contact? How many times have we avoided that woman at the office because she's annoying? How many times have we gone out of our way to avoid that person who smells and has poor hygiene? How many times have we ignored, insulted, or failed to love another person? This morning I want to give you an opportunity to change that. In front of you, you will find a pencil and there is space at the bottom of your bulletin. I want you to take a moment and write down the name of someone who you have not loved recently. Maybe you don't even know their name. Maybe at school...or at work...or even this church service. Write the name and pray for them during this time. Pray that you might know how to reach out to that person in love. Take sometime to prayerfully and thoughtfully write that name.

SONG "Baby" Lost and Found ©1992

1 John 4 NRSV

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.