

Series: Unlikely Encounters

At the Well

John 4:4-26

Sermon by Care Pastor Melonie Richards

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 8, 2026

A reading from John 4:4-26: “Now He had to go through Samaria, so He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon when a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The 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. Jesus answered her, ‘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.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as his sons and his livestock also did?’ Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so I will not get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.’ He told her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ ‘I have no husband,’ she replied. Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The 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.’ ‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’ ‘Woman,’ Jesus replied, ‘believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know. for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and His worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.’ The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you, I am He.’” This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Good morning. Thank you, Tim and Taryn. That was amazing. I love that. Glad that we could be here this morning. Thanks for making it. Thank you for those joining online. I am excited for what God has for us this morning. I am excited that we got some snow. It has been a while, and I am excited we all woke up and got here. I would like to open us in prayer.

Father, we just quiet our hearts. There is so much going on in our world. There is so much going on in our own minds. We just take a breath, and we ask, Holy Spirit, what is it you want to speak to us today? We want to hear. We want to sit with you. We want to know you more. We want to invite you into this space, and so we thank you. We thank you that you are here. We thank you that you are good. We thank you that your word is alive and active, and Lord, that you are going to meet with us today, so we surrender, and we give ourselves to you, Jesus, in your name, amen.

Imagine with me that you are walking, you are hiking on a trail. This is not a mountain trail with beautiful evergreens. This is a long desert road, and the blazing sun is beating down upon you. The ground is dry and cracked. Sweat is dripping off your forehead. Your mouth is dry. Your tongue is sticking to the roof of your mouth, and you are thirsty. You are thirstier than you have ever been before. All of a sudden, you imagine a tall glass of ice-cold water, but there is none, and what if in that moment, someone says to you, “I have water for you, water that will quench your thirst now and over and over again.” Our scripture today points to thirst satisfaction. It is not physical thirst. It is a deep spiritual thirst, because if we are honest, some of us are thirsty. Maybe all of us after that story, we are thirsty. We know we are doing the right things. We are coming to church. We are singing the songs. We are praying the prayers, but spiritually, we feel dry. We feel undernourished. We are checking off that spiritual to-do list, but we are really not encountering the presence of Jesus.

I know I have been in those spaces before. I think it is normal. I think we go through seasons. I remember back when I was caregiving for my mother-in-law. She had dementia. I was coming to church. I was sitting in the chair, but I just felt so dry. I was doing the right things but not feeling the presence of Jesus. I think sometimes we learn to live dehydrated, and we think, this is just the way it is. Jesus doesn't care. He is not going to meet me here, and we lower our expectations, but often, under the thirst is a symptom of something deeper, and it is shame, and shame says to you, you are not enough. Or maybe sometimes shame says, oh, you are too much. Maybe shame is saying you are disqualified. Maybe shame is saying you do not belong.

In John 4, Jesus meets a woman at a well at noon. This is the hottest part of the day. This is the loneliest part of the day. Women in that day, they did not go to the well at noon. They would go in the cool of the morning or in the cool of the evening, and they would go together as a group, but this woman, she goes alone, and noon. She goes at noon. That tells us something. That tells us she is managing something. It tells us she is avoiding something. It tells us that she is carrying something. She is carrying shame, but here is the good news. In this unlikely encounter, Jesus meets her at the well. Let's look at how He meets her. We are going to look at three different areas that He meets her in, in this unlikely encounter.

The first we begin with is ethnicity. John 4:4-7: “Now He had to go through Samaria, so He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there,” and this part I love. It says, “and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey.” He can relate to us. “He sat down by the well, and it was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ His disciples had gone into town to buy food.” Now it says Jesus had to go through Samaria. He had to go? Geographically, no. Spiritually, yes. It was not because of the geography that He had to go that way. It was because of his mission. It was because there was a thirsty woman at a well at noon. At this time, Jews avoided Samaritans at all costs. They went around that territory. They did not want to speak to them. The Assyrians had conquered this area of Israel before that time, of Judah, and they had intermarried with the Jews, and so Samaritans, they were looked upon as mixed race, as half-breeds, as biracial. They were inferior. The hostility ran deep.

You might remember in Luke 10 with the story of the Good Samaritan that the religious leader, he could not even say the word, “Samaritan.” He would not even utter the word, “Samaritan.” He said, “the one who showed mercy towards him,” so Samaritans were religiously inferior. They were not quite clean.

They were not acceptable, and this woman, the Samaritan woman at the well, she carries that shame with her. She carries it as an identity, and isn't it interesting, before Jesus ever mentions any relationships, before He ever offers her any living water, before worship happens, He gives her dignity by engaging in conversation with her. We can observe that she already feels like an outsider. She feels like an other. When she says to him in verse 9, 'You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' she is naming that ethnic barrier. 'Men like you do not talk to women like me.' People like you, they do not ask people like me for anything. There is the ethnic shame. She has grown up knowing I am less than, less pure, less right, less chosen. Some of you know what it feels like.

Some of you know what it feels like to be disqualified, to be discounted, to not quite fit, to feel like your background disqualifies you. Maybe, remember when we were in middle school, everyone felt awkward, right? You go into the cafeteria, and you have your little tray. You are scanning the room, like, "Where do I sit?" There are all these different groups of people, and you think, "Where do I belong? Where do I fit?" I think we have all had that feeling. The Samaritan woman, she did not feel that just occasionally. She carried that with her all the time. Shame has a way of attaching to our identity. Maybe your family background defines you. Maybe it is your ethnicity. Maybe it is your economic status. Maybe it is your past. Maybe it is the woundedness that you have experienced, but you notice what Jesus does. He walks into Samaria, He sits down at the well, and He asks her for a drink. He doesn't avoid her territory. He doesn't avoid her ethnicity. He does not treat her like a project. He engages with her as a person. Before He corrects anything, before He reveals anything, before He offers anything, He engages with her. He moves towards her. He had to go through Samaria? Yeah. Why? Because there was a woman sitting at the well in shame at noon. He was not going to walk around her. Some of us are convinced that Jesus walks around our story, that He will not step into it. He will not sit in those places. We have felt spiritually inferior. We have felt like that other. We have felt like we do not belong. Jesus meets her in her ethnic shame, and Jesus meets us in our shame. He does not turn away. He moves towards us.

Ethnicity is not the only barrier this woman faces. There is another layer, another vulnerability, another place of shame, and that is her gender. Gender is a hot topic right now, is it not? There is a lot of hurt and a lot of confusion around gender, and that happened long ago, and it is happening today, but let's take a look at how Jesus steps into that space, so we look at verses 9 and 10: "The 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. Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is who asked you for a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.' In this culture, men did not publicly speak to women. Rabbis, especially, did not speak to women. One commentator wrote this. He said, "The strict rabbis forbade a rabbi to greet a woman in public. A rabbi might not even speak," get this, "would not even speak to his own wife, daughter, or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called the bruised and bleeding Pharisees." Why? Because they shut their eyes. When they saw a woman, they would shut their eyes, they would be on the street, and so they walked into walls, and they walked into houses. Can you imagine? They are walking into walls and houses just because they would not look at a woman. Now, I have actually walked into a sliding glass door before, not for spiritual reasons, because I am clumsy, but these men thought it made them more righteous, and yet, Jesus speaks to the woman at the well, and He not only speaks to her, but He asks for a drink.

Do not miss this. Jesus did not open that conversation with confrontation. He did not open that conversation with correction. He opened that conversation with curiosity. I think this could be a relational example to us, to step back and ask, not assume, not correct, not demand, to say, “Will you give me a drink?” He humbles Himself. God in the flesh, He asks this woman for something. It is amazing. He dignifies her. He gives her a voice, and He engages her mind. They talk theology. This did not happen at that time. Men did not talk to women about theology, especially not a Samaritan woman in public. He is not just breaking these cultural norms and these barriers. He is dignifying her.

I find it interesting in this geographical area, years before this time, we find in Genesis 34, there is a couple, Jacob and Leah, and they have a daughter named Dinah, and if you recall that story, Dinah is abducted, and she is sexually assaulted, and if that has been part of your story, I just want to say I’m sorry. I want to pause and say I’m sorry. It is wrong, so Dinah was abducted against her will. She was mistreated. She was violated, and in this moment, in this area, Jesus takes a woman, takes off her shame, and gives her dignity. In this space, a woman was mistreated, and Jesus comes, and He gives her honor, and He gives her value. Jesus is restoring dignity to an outcast woman who has been bound by shame.

Some of us know what it is like to have dignity robbed, to be dismissed, to be underestimated, maybe to be overestimated, overlooked. Some of you have felt that in your marriage. You have felt unseen. Maybe it is in your workplace. You do not feel valued. You show up, and no one notices. Maybe it is in ministry. You are present but not valued, and this woman, her question reveals something. She is surprised. “How can you ask me? How can you as a man ask me as a woman for something?” and yet Jesus, He engages her. He listens to her. He answers her questions. He does not shrink her. He does not minimize her. He does not silence her. He sits with her. Jesus dignifies her before He corrects her. Before Jesus does anything else, He takes time to be with her.

So, we see Jesus, He crossed the ethnic barriers, He crossed gender barriers, and then He also goes into even deeper, and He speaks to her moral life. Before Jesus speaks to her moral life, before He even reveals her history, He speaks to her and restores her humanity, and this is what Jesus does. He meets us in places where the world dismisses us. Jesus meets us in our shame, and some of us need to hear that point, because we actually do the reverse of what Jesus does. We start with correction. We start with confrontation. We want to make sure our point is given, we are right, and we want to make sure that is known. Jesus does not begin with our failures. He meets us in places where we feel dismissed, and He brings dignity,

There is a story from the 1980s. Maybe you remember it. I think the world does not ever forget this story. It is a story about Princess Diana. In the 1980s, AIDS was at an epidemic level. People were terrified. They actually thought if you just touched someone, you could get AIDS, and so hospitals, they were lonely places. They were places of isolation. People were afraid to get close, but what did Princess Diana do? This amazing, beautiful woman, Princess Diana, she goes into the hospital room, and against all royal protocol, she takes off her gloves, and she reaches out, and she touches a man and holds his hand, this man who was dying from AIDS, this man who was deemed untouchable. She gives him worth. She says, “You have dignity. I can touch you. I am not afraid,” and then in an even deeper way, that is what Jesus does for us. The culture said to this woman, she was untouchable, but Jesus sits beside her. He speaks with her, and He offers and asks for a drink.

So, we have seen Jesus steps into her ethnic shame, steps into her gender shame, and then He also steps into her moral shame. Let's read verses 16 through 19: "He told her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, and you notice how He says it, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man that you are now with is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.' 'Sir,' the woman said to Him, 'I can see you are a prophet.' It is pretty observant of her, I think. 'Our ancestors, they worshiped here on this mountain, but you Jews, you claim the place we must worship is in Jerusalem.'" For years I have heard this story preached as almost a scandal, but you notice the tone. Jesus says to her, "You are right." He names her story, but He does not shame her. He does not call her a liar. He does not disgrace her. He highlights what has happened to her in her life and her current circumstances.

I don't know if you have heard of Christy McClelland. She's one of my new favorite Bible authors, scholars, not author, that would be God, Bible scholars. She is a Biblical culturist. She has traveled to the Holy Land since 2007. She knows the language. She knows the culture. She gives us a Biblical lens, and in her study, "Jesus and Women," she says this: "Jesus is not pointing out her sin, but He is meeting her in her deepest shame." In this unlikely counter, we do not see Jesus saying to this woman, "Leave your life of sin." He did not say that. Do you remember which story He said that in? He said that to the woman caught in adultery. Just to be clear, Jesus doesn't, He knows that cohabitation and living with someone without a marriage certificate is sin. He knows that. He knows that that is not the Father's design. This is not the issue Jesus was addressing with this woman, and unlike Jesus, oftentimes I can, and I think we all can, make it about the issue and not the person. Jesus is taking a woman who is an outcast, lifting her from shame to honor. He does not raise his voice. He simply reveals what He knows. How must that have felt, for her to feel known?

She felt known, and this changes everything, because shame survives in hiding. Shame survives in secret. Shame begins to lose its grip when it is seen and not rejected. Five husbands, in that culture, women did not initiate divorce. They did not have that option. They did not have that right. They did not have that choice. Men did. She likely has been dismissed and sent away repeatedly, and now she is living with someone who is not her husband. Why? Maybe survival in that culture. She might have needed that for survival. Maybe security. Maybe loneliness. We don't know, but what do we know? We know that she was a woman standing at noon alone, and Jesus steps directly into that complexity, not to condemn her, but to set her free, so we can see Jesus names her story, but He does not shame her. What if this is not scandal? What if this is sorrow? What if this is survival? What if this woman has been handed a divorce certificate she did not ask for?

Some of you know a story that you have been handed that you do not ask for, and I come to this passage as a woman who has been handed a divorce certificate that I did not ask for. When I was twenty-five, I was handed a divorce certificate, and my life was shattered. That was not what I wanted, and there were times when I felt shame. People look at you differently. They think of you differently because you are divorced. Sometimes divorce happens, and you have to initiate it, and it is not what you would choose, the sense that something about your life marks you, that when people look at you, they see a failure.

Some of you carry different versions of that noon. Maybe it is a financial collapse, bankruptcy you have encountered. Maybe it is a battle with an addiction. It is a hard one. You keep fighting, you keep

fighting, and you feel like you keep losing. Maybe it is a child wandering from the faith. It is not what you had hoped for. Maybe it is a body or a mind that feels broken. Maybe it is a secret that you pray no one uncovers, but what is breathtaking here is Jesus does not avoid her noon. He does not walk around her shame. He walks straight into it. He sits down beside it. He speaks to it, and He stays. Ethnic shame, gender shame, moral shame, He meets us in all of it.

We have watched Jesus walk into her noon. What Jesus is doing in this story, though, He is not just naming her shame. He is not just naming her story. He is exposing her thirst, that deeper level, that thirst. Let's look at John 4:13 through 14: "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. You can hear Him saying to this woman, she goes every day, bucket after bucket, day after day. She keeps coming back. She is managing survival, managing her reputation, managing loneliness.

I am wondering, have you ever tried to quench your thirst with salt water? Have you ever been in the ocean, and you got a big gulp of salt water? It satisfies for a moment, but it actually leaves you more dehydrated. It tricks our body. It promises satisfaction, but it deepens our thirst, and what this Samaritan woman was thirsty for was not really found in that well, the water in the ground. Like salt water, she kept managing these things. She was looking for relief from shame. It was belonging. It was a love that did not discard her. It was acceptance that did not expire, and Jesus says, the water I give, the water I give, water, life, a spring, this water is not something that you have to pull up by your bootstraps, you have to dig deep to get. This water is within, a spring of living water within. It is his Spirit that rises within you.

Shame makes us look for those substitute wells, wells of achievement, wells of control, wells of approval, wells of religious performance, if I just did better, if I could just fix this, if I could just clean myself up, but we keep coming back thirsty, because those wells cannot reach the place that shame lives. They manage the symptoms, but they do not heal the soul, and Jesus says to her, I am not offering you directions. I am not telling you to go to church more. In that case, I am not telling you to go to Jerusalem. I am not telling you to go to the temple to bring the sacrifice, to find the priest. In this culture, very much access to God was tied to a certain address. It was tied to the temple, to the tabernacle, and He looks at this Samaritan woman, who is far from Jerusalem, far from the temple, far from religious power, and He says, it is not the mountain. It is not the temple.

Do you know what that sounded like to them? It sounded like the floor of religion dropping out. It sounded like the power grid of religion being unplugged. No more standing outside hoping that you are clean enough. No more wondering if you brought the right sacrifice. No more believing that God is at one zip code. Jesus is not just replacing this whole religious system, which was radical. He is offering Himself. He is offering himself, not a new location, not a different relationship, not a better ritual. He is offering living water, living water, and here is what I love most. She does not argue with Him. She does not defend herself. She just leaves her jar. She leaves her jar.

So today, let me ask you, where is your noon, the place that you are trying to manage? Maybe it is the place you are trying to avoid. Maybe it is that place that you hope no one sees. What substitute well are you returning to? My question is, what would it look like today if we asked Jesus for living water, not a long, polished prayer? What if we just said today, "Jesus, I am thirsty"?

The question is not whether He will cross the boundary and break down the barrier. He already has. The question for us today is, “Will I drink? Will I receive?” Jesus is still waiting at wells at noon. He is still crossing barriers. He is still meeting shame without shaming. He is still offering living water, and when we drink, when you drink, you can leave the jar. You do not have to keep managing your thirst. You do not have to keep performing your way into belonging. You do not have to keep hiding at noon, because the spring is not outside of us. The spring is inside of us. It is his Spirit that wells up within us and overflows. So, we are going to take a time of silence, a time to sit with some reflection, a time that I ask you to spend thinking about three questions, questions up on the screen. Where is your noon? What are you drinking that keeps you thirsty, and what would it look like today to ask for that living water? Jesus meets us in our shame. He does not leave us thirsty. Let’s sit with Him. Let’s ask Him. What does He want to say to us today?

Now for the benediction. Today we have touched on some important topics. If you would like someone to pray with you, we are going to have people at the sides of the room, Stephen ministers, staff members, and elders. Maybe you are feeling spiritually dry. Maybe you want to know more about Jesus. Maybe you just need prayer. We want to provide that for you today. One of the things I love most about this story is the woman at the well, she did not defend herself. She did not argue. She just left her jar. In John 4:28 and 39, “Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to town, and she said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I did. Could this be the Messiah?’ They came out of the town and made their way towards Him. Many of the Samaritans from the town, they believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony.”

She felt like an outsider, and she moved to be an influencer. She came for water, and she left in worship. She came carrying shame, and she met a savior. She came alone, and she left leading a city. Like that woman at the well, Jesus invites us that we would go and do likewise. It is so reassuring to know that Jesus uses broken people to bring about the beauty of his kingdom. So today, Jesus, we ask, would you be our living water? Would you be glorified? Would you make yourself known to all people, so that you would be glorified? We love you, Jesus, and we praise you, in your name, amen.

36:14 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #927