



“Sharing the Good Stuff”

a sermon by

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You will recall last week we took up the exchange between Jesus and the woman from Samaria at the well. This unnamed woman was going about her daily chores when she encountered Jesus, who shocked her by not only speaking to her - which was against the Hebrew law for him to do as a teacher a single man, and a Jew - but then proceeded to share with her glimpses of her own past, and tell her the truth that he was the Messiah. He then offered her living waters from a well that would never run dry - a well that was faith and life in God through him as Christ. But the story does not end here, with Christ's proclamation to the woman that he is the long-awaited Messiah. There is another scene to this narrative that is not to be missed. So we will pick up our text right where we left off last week, at the close of Jesus' conversation with the woman, when his disciples return from town where they had gone to buy food while Jesus sat and rested.

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

I am completely charmed by this subtle, one line directorial comment of John's, “Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.” The Bible is filled with comedy because it was filled with real people who are prone to doing funny things and I think this is one of those instances that is often lost on us. I've combed through the commentaries, but no one else seems to think much of this line, but I love it, “The woman left her water jar and went back to the city.” The exchange between Jesus and the woman before the scene shifts to our text is certainly the most lengthy conversation recorded between Jesus and a woman in any gospel. There is a lot for her to be excited about here - a chance encounter with a Jew who did not scorn or shun her for one thing; a strange prophet who reveals her past to her for another; and who then finally reveals that he is the Savior of the world. So what I see in John's cue is an embedded exclamation point propped up right next to the empty jug forgotten by the well, the original intent of the woman's outing being eclipsed by her enthusiasm to share this incredible experience with others. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Her words peak the interest of the Samaritans, and they leave the city to go out to see him. It is a simple invitation to a different way of viewing life that the woman extends to her fellow townspeople. She herself seems unsure of her convictions about Jesus' Messianic claim, but they didn't see too concerned about that. She knew there was something to him - things looked different when she glimpsed her life and her claims through his eyes - so now come, she says, and see for yourself.

And come and see they did. This people, arch-enemies of the Jews, went to see what this Jewish man Jesus was all about- who spoke to their friend in a very different way than perhaps he should have. Who crossed boundaries instead of constructing them, and who defied their expectations and caught their imagination. Who challenged the status quo of their faith by telling them they did not need to worship on a mountain as they had been, or in a temple like the Jews, but in Spirit and in truth, for all ethnic distinctions and the religious trappings therein fade in the light of God's glorious plan for salvation. As if to foreshadow their arrival, John gives us a taste of a conversation among insiders- Jesus with his own disciples. Jesus, fueled by the food of his vocation to do God's work and share his will talks about a spiritual harvest- the time of waiting between seed planting and reaping the reward of the crops is over, 'look around you,' he says, 'and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.' The Samaritan woman and her willingness to receive his Word and become a witness to him being a prime example.

Now, start talking about harvesting souls, and we Presbyterians at least get a little nervous. I don't know exactly how, but somehow, somewhere along the way, the idea of sharing our experience of Jesus with others began to offend even us. Perhaps it is a reaction to consumerist approaches to Christianity that we tried to avoid- that focus more on what Jesus can do for us rather than what we can do for Jesus. Perhaps we got caught up in the riptides of relativism, that profess that there is no shore, there is no one solid ground, only your experience of the movement of society around you that you must learn to respect, but that drags you ever so slowly out into a vast and lonely sea where your feet do not even begin to touch bottom, and where you could drown from exhaustion. Or perhaps it was because of pluralism- where we thought that sharing our experience of God in Jesus and asking others to share their own somehow meant that, by definition, we weren't loving our neighbors who hold a different faith. No, I don't know where the disconnect took place for us between the challenging but more comfortable fact that we are laborers in the field and the calling that we are to actually help bring in the harvest. I myself am guilty, guilty of this error. I stand here before you today guilty. Because it is hard to profess Jesus and is it any wonder why? Look just at this passage even- look at what he does- crosses boundaries instead of constructing them. Smudges the dividing lines of race and ethnicity until they are unrecognizable because at some point we're all just going to have to accept the fact that we are saved by grace rather than by our history or heritage or bank accounts, or even by the very best of our good works. To him there is no gas station attendant, or high powered attorney, there are only children of God. Jesus says, I don't care who you are or where you worship, it just doesn't matter because what I am offering you is the real good stuff of life- the Spirit and truth of life that is your Lord. Quite frankly, not only is it a little risky to talk about seeing the world through Christ's eyes, it is also a little embarrassing, because you are talking about this guy Jesus who has really transformed your life and view of the world, but it's not like you can bring him to lunch, or share his lecture notes, or introduce him to your friends for them to get to know... or can you?

I was speaking with a colleague of mine, Leslie Stacks, the other day when she clued me in to a concept that is just as intriguing to me as the line in here about that lonely jug by the well. It is a gesture that you may have experienced, but that has been honed into a philosophy in New Orleans- it is a Creole word called lagniappe (that's 'l-a-g-n-i-a-p-p-e'), and it means 'a little something extra.' It is something that you give when you just want to share the abundance of good stuff in your life with someone else. An example of a lagniappe would be when a customer makes a purchase from a merchant, but the merchant gives them a little something extra in return- not as a vie for future business, but as a way of sharing the blessing that they have received. The most common lagniappe that is exchanged in New Orleans is a praline- that sweet solid sugary

puddle of pecans and syrup cooked and cooled to perfection- if you've not had one, go out today and find one- but the passing of the praline literally signifies a desire to share the sweetness in your life with another, because you are overflowing with blessing. You simply hand over the extra gift, and say 'lagniappe.'

I mention this concept of lagniappe, because I think it can help us salvage our modern understanding of sharing the good news - the literal definition of evangelism- just that good news- of Jesus Christ to the world around us. We have experienced blessing in abundance, so let us simply let that blessing overflow from within us and out to others, so that they may be blessed in return, and possibly even seek out the source for themselves. Our woman by the well is the perfect witness to its power. She did not proselytize, she did not preach, it's like St. Anselm once said, proclaim the gospel- use words only when necessary- she simply shared the good stuff she experienced with Jesus with those around her and gave them an invitation to participate in the life of faith by pointing them in the right direction and letting the rest take its course. "Come and see!" is all she said. "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." A simple offering of the gift of her experience- and an entire community is transformed. A little something extra given in her excitement- not just by sharing with those around her her daily experiences, but sharing how she experienced Jesus *that day*.

Jesus said, "But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life." It is my prayer that we will not be afraid of the call to harvest, but will embrace it. That we will live in to the spirit of the lagniappe, and simply share the overflowing sweetness of God's blessing with others. Show them how your view of the world changed when you looked at it through Jesus' eyes. Speak to them of the ways he spoke a word of truth to you about your life and then simply invite them to receive the blessing for themselves. Come and see! It is my prayer that we will not be afraid to claim Jesus as our Savior, because he sure was not afraid to claim us! We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world. We are in the season of harvest. And it is time to bring in the fruit. Amen.