

John 4:1-29

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’— although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he 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 water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ 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. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ 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.’

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?’

Intentional Discipleship Part 3: Take the Offensive.

We’re in the middle of a worship series I’ve named “Intentional Discipleship” where I’ve been focusing on the things we **MUST** do if we’re at all serious about following Jesus. I began the series by emphasizing our need to **plant ourselves by the Living Water**, or in other words, place our trust in God, not in ourselves; we don’t know what’s good for us – we think we do, but as long as we place our trust in ourselves we are doomed to fail. Last week I explained how **the**

world pushes back when we try to lead others to follow Jesus. I said that Jesus calls us to a radical love, and love is measured by how much you're willing to give, how much you're willing to sacrifice. Church has become too easy, demanding nothing of her people. Churches want to avoid controversy, and so they become impotent, standing for nothing and doing nothing. I said that it's time to gird ourselves for battle, knowing that we are constantly tempted to take the easy road, to avoid any danger or controversy. To be faithful to Jesus is to live a life full of risks, but the price you pay for avoiding those risks is nothing less than your soul.

Today I want to talk about another important step that we must take as disciples of Jesus, and that is **to go on the offensive. Share the good news with everyone.** Not enough Christians are aggressive about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ because the Church has been attacked for a lot of reasons. Some of them are good reasons – revelations of child abuse in the Catholic Church have driven many Catholics out of the Church; discrimination against homosexuals in all churches has made most people the gay community feel that they are not welcome in the Church. And many misguided Christians who choose to ignore scientific and historic evidence give reasonable people the impression that Christians are voluntarily ignorant. To coin a modern phrase, the Church “has issues.” But those issues are not issues shared by every church and not by every Christian, **and the good news of Jesus Christ is like a medicine to an ailing soul. There is a balm in Gilead** And our silence is a response borne out of fear, and in Christ we are free from such fear. Today I'd like to make **three points** regarding this commission to share the good news with everyone, and they have to do with *what* you're sharing, *why* you share it, and *how* you share it. I'll use our scripture lesson to talk about this.

First, *what* do you share? You share NEWS that God is in the world and actively changing the world, just as God is in our lives and changing them for the better. The Bible offers testimony that God not only created the world but has been active in the world, and that Jesus of Nazareth was God's unique messenger, God's own son, who came to show us how our lives are to be lived. To use the metaphor from today's scripture lesson, Jesus came to offer us LIVING WATER that becomes in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. It is life that is shaped by the very Spirit of God, and being that God is good and loving and perfect, our lives in Christ become good and loving and perfect. It is the greatest gift that could ever be shared with anyone. Most people go through life with the illusion that good friends and a good job and a good marriage and a good neighborhood will satisfy them. What they fail to understand is that God did not create us to find our joy *individually*; rather God created us to be united, to be our brothers' (and sisters') keeper. We are all God's children created to love one another, so **my** joy cannot be complete as long as *any* of my brothers and sisters is suffering. Today marks the beginning of Black History Month, and I'm reminded of what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King once said: “An individual has not started *living* until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Jesus offers us LIVING water because he wants us to truly live, to have abundant life, which is life that is intricately connected to every other life on this planet.

Why do you share this news with others? Hopefully because you love them. You're not sharing it to bring people into the church building so that they can put money in the offering plate so that you can pay the gas bill next month. We don't see people as means to our own ends. We see people as children of God. Some are dealing with very real and very serious life issues, and to

them we offer our resources – prayer, money, labor, food, clothing, housing, counseling, or just a shoulder to cry on. Some folks are dealing with spiritual issues. We see their anger and fear and frustration and self-deception and we want them to be liberated. They don't have to be unhappy or angry and bitter or cynical or frightened, because God is real and God is in charge, and it's a good idea to put him in charge of your life instead of insisting on placing yourself in the driver's seat and finding yourself stuck in traffic all the time. God can take you out of that mess if you allow him to. We share because we care!

How do you share the good news with others? You share it in the way you live your life, and by that I don't mean that you intentionally set yourself apart from others; there are some Christians who think that witnessing is all about what you **don't** do – I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't cuss, I don't watch those movies or read those books or listen to that music. It's fine to choose not to do certain things, but don't let personal piety become your goal. **YOUR GOAL IS TO LOVE OTHERS**, and that means that you sometimes have to go where people cuss or drink smoke or something. In today's reading we find Jesus in Samaria, a land full of people that the average Jew *hated*. We find Jesus speaking to a woman, someone that society had censured, who organized religion had banned from becoming a leader and who was deemed insignificant at best. To add one more strike against her, she was a woman who seemed to be living in sin – we don't know if her previous husbands were dead or divorced, but we know that the man she is currently living with is *not* her husband, and the fact that she comes to this well *alone* in the middle of the day suggests that there were people she didn't want to see, didn't want to hear from, didn't want to confront. Notice that Jesus never tells this woman to repent, never demands that she change her ways in order to be worthy of God's love. Jesus sees a woman, perhaps a very confused and unhappy woman, and he sees her innermost need, the need for God in her life. Your goal is to help those in need, and your motivation is LOVE, not self-righteousness. Now some people share the good news very openly, preaching in subway stations and on the ferry. There are groups that bring PA systems out to Time Square and sing and preach publically. This is actually a technique that used to be popular among Methodists; John Wesley used to preach to thousands of people in town squares, and Methodists used to conduct camp meetings for days at a time, bringing people together to hear the good news. This sort of sharing can still be very effective in changing people's lives and bringing them to Jesus Christ. I can't knock it, though I would say that not everyone who claims to share the good news is in fact sharing *good* news; some folks are sharing a theology that is harmful and hurtful and tends to attract people who are afraid that they may be bound for hell. Preaching the word to people is fine, but let your motivation be love.

And let your sharing be two-directional. Spend at least as much time listening as you spend talking. See how Jesus interacts with this woman in today's lesson. He begins by expressing his own need, for some water. And there's an unspoken message in Jesus' request. Jesus doesn't have his own drinking vessel, and it was considered dirty to drink from the same vessel as a Samaritan. This woman knew that. Jesus is telling her that this doesn't matter to him. And then he listens to this woman as she shares questions and answers. *They're having a conversation, Jesus and this woman, this sinner, this Samaritan!*

That's just the kind of guy that Jesus is, and that's the kind of person he wants *us* to be. And the way you get to know Jesus is to pray, to study scripture, and to interact with people, because you

just don't know in what form Jesus may present himself to you. Saint Francis had such an encounter with Jesus. One day Francis met a man afflicted with leprosy while riding his horse near Assisi, and though the sight of the leper filled him with horror and disgust, Francis got off his horse and kissed the leper. Then the leper put out his hand, hoping to receive something. Out of compassion, Francis gave money to the leper. But when Francis mounted his horse again and looked all around, he could not see the leper anywhere. Francis says that he realized that he had just kissed and ministered to Jesus, who said, "Inasmuch as you've served the least of these you have served me." Now I don't know if Jesus miraculously appeared in the form of a poor leper or if Francis just had an epiphany and realized that Jesus is indeed present among the least of these, but when we become familiar with Jesus as he is revealed to us in scripture, we are more aware of his presence in those around us.

So be on the offensive. Take the good news to others. Share it in your words and in your deeds. To a person who is genuinely transformed by the love and grace of God, sharing that love and grace comes naturally. The truth is we are all works in progress; we need to continue to focus on those first two steps of discipleship; planting ourselves in living water (that is, dedicating ourselves to prayer and scripture study), and resisting the temptation to compromise our commitment to Jesus out of fears that are all too real for us – we need to ground ourselves in Jesus Christ to conquer those fears. And the more you're grounded in Christ, the more courage you'll gain, and then sharing the good news of Jesus Christ will come naturally. Note how the Samaritan woman shares about Jesus. She's obviously excited about having met this man. She has lost her fears about speaking to others. She may suffer from low self-esteem because of the way others look at her, this woman who's had several husbands and is currently living with a guy who's not her husband, but she shares the news regardless. **And she shares HONESTLY** – notice that when she tells the town folks about Jesus, she closes with a question: "He can't be the Messiah, can he?" A lot of us have uncertainty about who Jesus is, what it means to call him 'Son of God.' We can be honest about our own questions yet still know Jesus as our Savior and our Lord, and we can share that with others.

May God continue to nurture you in his love and grace that you may live a life that is pleasing to him and lead others to do the same. Amen.