

³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ 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.)^[a] ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ 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?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² 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." This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

“We Need To...”

*“*He needed to go through Samaria.*” (repeat). That’s what Scripture says. Yet, in reality, Jesus and his disciples did not HAVE to go through Samaria to get from Judea to Galilee, did they? They could have gone around. Most all good Jews did. Most all good Jews did because the Samaritans were their enemies, seen as despicable, inferior people in every way (racially, religiously and socially). “For over 700 years Jews and Samaritans had been arguing and generally hating one another as only members of the same family can argue and hate”.¹

*They were, you see, both children of Abraham, descendants of the tribes of Jacob. However, when the Jews of the Northern Kingdom, later to be called Samaritans, were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, many of them married the pagan captives that were brought in by the Assyrians. This, in essence, diluted the faith and resulted in the Jews of the South considering them to be “half Jews”, a “mixed race”. And in 587 BC, when the Southern Kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians, the Jews from there tenaciously remained pure and clung to their faith, despite the fact that they were cruelly enslaved and carried off to Babylon. When they were allowed to return to Judah, 70 years later, history records that the Samaritans of the North offered to assist them in rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple, but the Southern Jews rejected the offer. Hostilities began.

*The Samaritans retaliated by building their own temple on Mt. Gerazim. Over the years, skirmishes and tiffs resulted in an entrenchment of their bitter relationship. In fact, the feelings continue to this day. Geographically, ancient Samaria makes up the majority of the area known as the West Bank. And yet scripture tells us that on a trip back to Galilee “*Jesus NEEDED to go through Samaria*”. “Why?” (Pause)

*Although his disciples were not happy about it, when they got hungry, they left Jesus to rest at a well, Jacob’s well in fact, while they went to get food. And when at the well, a woman approached Jesus with a bucket. And Jesus asked her for a drink.

¹ John Buchanan. “*Astonished*” <http://www.explorefaith.org/homiliesLent/2006/20060322.html>. (accessed 3/17/2017)

Now, before we go any further, there's some important background info to note. First, not only would a Jewish man rather die of thirst than ask a Samaritan for a drink, but never would a man speak to a woman in public who was not his wife. And second, women of that day drew water in the cool of the early morning or evening, and the time of drawing water was a social affair. This woman came in the heat of the midday...and was alone. Scholars agree that she was an outcast. But most feel that she was not ostracized because she had a shady past, despite the fact that she'd had 5 husbands, and was living with one that was not her husband.² They believe that it is likely that the woman had instead the not-so-uncommon misfortune of being widowed, abandoned or divorced...numerous times. Jesus did not tell her to repent, "to go and sin no more" as he did with the woman caught in adultery. Nothing is said about the situation involving sinful behavior. Scholars also suspect that she was barren, for "the man who wasn't her husband" was likely her deceased husband's brother. These Levirate marriages were common for childless widows in order that an heir could be produced. If indeed this is true, it would have not been usual for her to be excluded from the community, treated as a disgrace, lesser, the object of marginalization.

*"May I have a drink?", Jesus asked. Then... he told her that he could give her "living water". It is clear that she did not understand what he meant. She didn't grasp that the Living Water he referred to was a life redeemed, reclaimed, bought back by God, and one that, by the power of the Spirit, brings life to others. *Yet, critically, she asked to have the living water. It is also clear that she became more and more amazed in their conversation that Jesus knew the shameful things about her and yet didn't seem to care. He instead was dignifying her humanity in a way that she'd never known. And he seemed to understand her vulnerability.

*When it occurred to her that this might be the Messiah, she dropped her bucket and ran to tell others. She dropped her old way of life behind and ran to the new life which had been opened to HER! The townspeople came to see too and ended up inviting Jesus and his

² Karoline Lewis. "Holy Conversations. In: Craft of Preaching. <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4839>. (accessed 3-17-17).

disciples to stay with them, and they did...for several days!

*So, back to our original question, why did “*Jesus need to go through Samaria*”? Well, could it be that he knew he’d have this interaction with the Samaritan woman and wanted to show his disciples, to show us, to show whole world, what God’s Kingdom, God’s way, on earth looks like, people accepting others, people pushing beyond religious divisiveness, racial prejudice, gender exclusivism and political separation in order to put a face on the other? Could it be that that’s why *he needed to go through Samaria*? Maybe you’ve heard the recent joke, “*Why did Jesus cross the road?*” “*To get to the Other.*”

*Friends, we live in a time not unlike the one in this story (*slowly*). Ours is a time of deepening ethnic and racial tensions, widening economic rifts, extreme religious divisions, and seemingly irreversible political polarization. The angry and hateful rhetoric, name-calling, bullying these days, particularly in our politics, but trickling down to everyday interactions of the people has become so common that we are beginning, sadly yes, to not be shocked, and to have to think to remember the kind words and respect that should be part of our usual conversations. The consequences are happening in our own lives. We tire of the other’s ways, we regard their opinions as ignorant and unenlightened, we feel burdened by their perspectives and ultimately, we disregard THEM. We not see them...we forget, in fact, to look at them.

*But, you know, if we call ourselves Christians, we need to. We “*need to go through Samaria*”. We need to remember that Jesus’ way is to break down such attitudinal barriers. It is to put a face on our “enemies” and while not condoning what they do if we think it wrong, to consider their contexts, to try to get in their shoes and look at the world as they do. It is to understand them as vulnerable sinners and the sinned against, just like us. Just like us. Then walls fall down and tables of grace can be spread. Britain’s Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, recently asked, “*Can we recognize God’s image in someone who is not in our image, whose language, faith, and ideals, are different from ours? If not, we have made God in our image instead of allowing God to remake us in his.*”³

³ Jonathan Sacks. “*The Dignity of Difference*”. (London: Bloombury Press; 2002) 201.

**In 1968, with battles over desegregation raging in America, Fred Rogers, ordained Presbyterian Minister, but then producer and host of the iconic children's program, Mister Roger's Neighborhood, invited an African American named Francois Clemmons to share his kiddie pool on a particular episode of the show. Francois Clemmons played the local police officer, Officer Clemmons! * "I thought it was civil rights light. That pool of water seemed so insignificant to me," Francois said. "I didn't get the impact of the symbolism that so many other people would see and totally understand. It was a visual metaphor for them which decried segregated pools around the country. *Children and parents everywhere were seeing a white and black man sharing the same pool and although we were different, they saw that we were friends. And when I explained that I didn't have a towel to dry off with, they also heard Mr. Rogers say, "Here, take mine!"*

**Yes, Francois was just 24 years old, an aspiring operatic tenor, when Fred Rogers first asked him to visit the neighborhood. He said about his first day, "We walked around and saw the tree, the clock, the castle, the trolley and I thought that's well and good but what does that have to do with me? I'm just a ghetto boy. I grew up poor, gay, neglected, abused in Youngstown Ohio, home of the steel mills. Guys that I grew up with gambled, drank, and did a lot of things, but they didn't play with puppets. I didn't get Fred Rogers' message of love at the core of all things for a long time.*

**But during one segment, one day, we made eye contact and I heard him say, "You know I like you just the way you are. You make every day a special day." And something inside of me just turned on. I thought "he's talking to me!" No person had ever told me that he loved me. I knew he meant it." I've always lived on the outside. Always wanting to belong. But Fred Rogers said it wasn't true. *Fred Rogers said it wasn't true. That meant the world to me as it did to millions of little children in our country." ⁴*

**Clemmons had a 25 year tenure as Officer Clemmons on the show. As a farewell to Clemmons, a second version of the iconic pool scene was filmed. Prior to it, Fred Rogers reminded Clemmons of how Jesus washed the disciples' feet and then he not only shared his*

⁴ Faith Salin. "Back in the Neighborhood" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfxJnXXrTxQ> (accessed 3-11-23).

*towel, but he washed and dried his friend's feet for the whole world to see.*⁵

*Brothers and sisters, the heart of our faith is a love, a wondrous love, that did not judge or exclude a Samaritan woman due her past or her religion or race or gender, but graciously accepted her and loved her back to her humanity, as a child of God. It is a love that is offered to each of us too no matter how others have defined us. It is a wondrous love which calls us to extend love to others by the power of his Spirit living in us. Friends, let's take a drink of the living water and then pour it out abundantly upon EVERYONE else. Let's go through Samaria. We need to. Amen.

⁵Michael Henninger. "Fred Rogers' Neighbors: A Carnegie Mellon Story." <https://www.cmu.edu/news/stories/archives/2019/november/mister-rogers-neighbors.html> (accessed 3-11-23).