

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 4: John 4:4-30, 39-42 - Jesus: Seeker of the Outsider

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of John from previous weeks. What kind of literature is the gospel of John? Who wrote it? What is the book's main purpose? How is the book organized? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? What do you remember from Chapter 1?

Today's Passage: Today's passage is found in the second "section" of John's gospel (remember the 5 sections from week 1?), in which Jesus uses signs and new interpretations of traditional Jewish practices to reveal who He is. We meet Jesus in this passage in an unexpected place- at a well in a region called Samaria. Samaritans and Jews had been bitter enemies for over 200 years, and usually did everything that they could to avoid each other. Not only does Jesus initiate a pivotal ministerial moment here, he does so with a Samaritan woman, breaking all established gender and societal "rules" as he continues to redefine what it means to be a disciple, and the unexpected people that are invited into life with him.

CONTENT:

Read John 4: 4-30, 39-42 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Having heard the full story, why do you think Jesus "had to go through Samaria" (vs 4), knowing that most Jews traveled out of their way to avoid this region?

2. The conversation between Jesus and the woman happens at a well. Throughout the Old Testament, wells often serve as sites of betrothal/engagement. How does that understanding change or deepen this story? What is really going on here?
3. One main reason the Jews and the Samaritans were enemies was because the Samaritan people had a history of worshiping other gods, or in biblical terms, “marrying themselves” to a bunch of wrong gods. If the Samaritan woman serves as a symbol of the Samaritan people as a whole, how does her story tie to this history? What is Jesus’ posture towards her, towards this people who have been “unfaithful”?
4. In verse 26, Jesus identifies Himself to the woman as “I Am.” This is a powerful echo (and the first of 7 times in John- remember how much John loves 7’s!?) of when God revealed Himself to Moses as “I Am” in Exodus. Why might Jesus have chosen this moment, this woman, to speak this identity?
5. What does the woman leave behind in verse 26? Why might this be important?
6. When the people of Samaria encounter Jesus, they identify him with a new name at the end of verse 42. Why is this last word so important? What do they seem to understand that many Jewish religious people did not understand? How does it tie to John 1: 10-13?

APPLICATION:

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion.

- Samaritans were considered outcasts, unlovable, unsavable. Who would modern day Samaritans be in our world? In your life? Here on campus?
- Jesus does not say “clean up your act, come back here when you are all put together, and then I will offer myself to you.” Instead, he encounters the woman exactly where she is- in the regular stuff of her regular, messy life- and invites her into a life with Him. What does that stir in you? Do you struggle to believe this is the invitation of God? Have you ever experienced God meeting you with love in a messy part of your life?
- Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that all the arguments about where and how worship should happen are unimportant. What matters is the heart of those who come to him (vs 19-24). Do we still have these kinds of divisive arguments? Where do you see them happening? What do you think Jesus means when he says he desires people who worship in spirit and truth?
- There are times in Scripture where Jesus says “Follow Me!” and there is an immediate faith response. But there are other times- like this encounter- where the faith process is slower. Where there are lots of questions, misunderstandings, and even disbelief before there is faith. Do you identify at all with the woman in this story? What parts? What does this conversation teach you about God and his posture towards our questions, misunderstandings, disbelief?

PRAYER:

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below.

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer from Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia:

*Father, Son, and Spirit-
We remember the woman at the well –
her questions, her truth, her witness.
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, so like her
we may ask candidly,
reveal ourselves deeply, and
share your Good News freely.
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,
so we may worship you in spirit and truth.
Amen.*

