



November 18, 2012  
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*All Things New:  
New Evangelism  
John 4:1-7*

Cyndi and I flew back yesterday from Jeremy's installation as the new Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Fresno. I wish you could have been there. It was so powerful, so emotional, so filled with hope. I heard two comments over and over again. "Thank your church for preparing Jeremy for us," and "We will take good care of them." And we said, over and over again, "You'd better!" I think they will. It is clear that Fresno loves the Vaccaros. You know, I always call you the sweetheart church. There's no church like you. But as we left, Diane said, "Maybe now you'll admit that there are two sweetheart churches." I said, "Not yet, I won't. Talk to me in 25 years and we'll see." But so far, so good! Anyhow, Chapel Hill, you should be very proud of our boy.

And speaking of installations, I know you will want to join us tonight for our own historic moment: when we ordain and install Larry and Megan Hackman as our new Assistant Pastors. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. He took away our beloved Vaccaros. He has given us our newly beloved Hackmans. Twenty-two of their family and friends have flown from across the country to join them for this important moment, but it is our important moment, too! Please come! And then join us Wednesday for our Thanksgiving Eve service as the Hackmans bring their first sermon as our new pastors!

When our daughter Rachel was five years old, we bought her compass to go on the zipper of her little red fleece vest. Later that evening as we were getting ready for dinner, Rachel started yelling, "Raise your hand if you are lost!" No one was really paying attention. She repeated herself more energetically... as Rachel can do. "Raise your hand if you are lost!" Finally I asked, "Rachel, what are you talking about?" She replied, "If I have a compass, then I can help the people who are lost. Who's lost?"

Wouldn't it be great if life were that simple? Just say to friends and family, "Raise your hand if you are spiritually lost. If you don't know where you are going... aren't certain how to get to God... just raise your hand." Unfortunately, many people don't realize that they are lost. And those who do are so ashamed of their life that they can't imagine how God or God's people would want to have anything to do with them.

We have a compass. It is this book, the Bible, and it points unerringly toward the Way, the Truth and the Life—Jesus Christ. We, who know Jesus, know this is true. And we know we are supposed to share that good news with others... supposed to be evangelists. But even the word “evangelism” raises images of puffy hair, shiny suits, white pianos and mascara-stained wives. Surely there is a better way to reach out to our lost friends with the good news of a God who came looking for them?

Well, there is. When Jesus shared the good news it was natural, gracious, patient and sweet-spirited, not necessarily qualities we identify with evangelism today. Over the next two weeks, we are going to learn a new way of doing evangelism as we eavesdrop on a conversation between Jesus and a most unlikely new friend.

[Read John 4:1-7]

After Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in Jerusalem, he heads north to his home turf. But in verse 4 we read something interesting: “Now he had to go through Samaria.” It is true that Samaria lies between Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. It is not true that Jesus had to go through Samaria to get to Galilee. As a matter of fact, good religious Jews refused to enter Samaria. They would cross the Jordan River, go up the east side through Perea and Decapolis, and then cross back over the Jordan into Galilee. Why would they make that detour?

Because, the Jews despised the Samaritans. In 722 Assyria invaded the ten northern tribes of Israel and carried them into captivity, never to be heard from again. This was God’s judgment upon them for their idolatry which included child sacrifice. But some Israelites were left behind along with thousands of occupying Assyrians. Over the decades, those Assyrians intermarried with the left-behind Jews. The resulting half-breed ethnic group was known as Samaritans.

Samaritans continued to worship Yahweh, but they also adopted the worship of Assyrian gods. As far as true Jews were concerned, Samaritans were a mongrel tribe of idol worshipers who had betrayed their Jewish faith. Imagine the contempt that exists between a Ku Klux Klansman and a black man and you may get the idea of how much the Jews hated the Samaritans. A proper Jew would not defile himself by traveling through Samaritan territory. They would rather lengthen their journey by many miles than set foot in the land of their ancient and reviled enemies.

So why did Jesus have to go into Samaria? Maybe because Jesus was determined to break down this ancient hostility. Do you remember whom Jesus makes the hero of one of his most famous parables? The Good Samaritan. The people that others shunned, Jesus always welcomed. But it might also be because he had a divine appointment. I think the Holy Spirit told him, “I want you to go this way

because I have someone for you to meet. This will be a little inconvenient. But I have work here for you to do. Go this way."

And here we discover the first element of "Jesus evangelism: " Availability—the willingness to step out of your comfort zone and onto their turf, whoever they are. If you won't do this—if you won't make yourself available to those who don't know Jesus—evangelism will only ever be a theory for you. Here in church we nod our heads up and down enthusiastically when the preacher says we ought to share Jesus with others, but if we are not willing to actually move into their territory it'll never happen. It's just a bunch of Christian blather.

Last weekend our LifeGroup went on a hunting trip that we purchased at last year's Youth Benefit. And Saturday night, we went to eat at Rae Lynn's in Sprague. Rae Lynn's the only restaurant in Sprague. If you won't eat there, you won't eat. But it is a pretty seedy joint. The bar is barely fenced off from minors by a piece of PVC pipe, the place reeks of smoke, and a huge Malamute dog named Henry walks up to your table while you are eating. And when Rae Lynn's fills up, you do not have the sense that you have walked into a prayer meeting. Not exactly my comfort zone.

But as I think about our text, it does make me wonder, "How available am I to those outside my Chapel Hill club? Where are the places I hang out that I can be pretty sure there will some non-Christ-followers in the room?" If I serve the God who "became flesh and pitched his tent in our midst..."—the ultimate act of availability—surely, I should be willing to reach out to those who may not be my cultural cup of tea?

Or maybe they are! You don't need to go to Rae Lynn's to be "available." There are plenty of opportunities in everyday life to walk across the coffee shop or across the office or across the classroom. Remember, this is not yet about giving them the gospel. This is about making yourself available to folks you might otherwise ignore.

I am the world's worst airplane evangelist. When I get on a plane, I put in my orange ear plugs—orange rather than flesh-colored so that they can be more easily spotted by my seat mate—and then, if I'm feeling very reclusive, I'll put my Bose headphones over the top of my ear plugs. But dang it, I knew I was preaching this sermon, so Thursday night before my flight to Fresno I said to the Lord, "All right, if I must I will be available to the people on this airplane. Dang it!" And, since our flight was delayed 4½ hours, I had plenty of time to be available! It was actually okay. I had a nice conversation with my seat mate. And I carried a young mother's bags on and off for her so that she could attend to her two little ones, which I would have done anyhow. But all of this started because I prayed, "I am willing, Lord, to be available." I didn't preach... didn't lead my seatmate to Christ, but I also didn't set up the double ear plug barrier, either. It was a baby step. For me, a big one.

Are you willing just to be available to others in your life? If you are not, there's no point in listening any further. There must be YouTube video you can watch on your phone for the rest of the service. But if you are willing to be available to the Holy Spirit, it's amazing how God uses those encounters. The "Jesus way" of evangelism starts with Availability. What else?

*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 Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"*

It was bad enough that Jesus was in Samaria. Now John ratchets up the tension another notch. The exhausted and thirsty Jesus stops at a well and up walks a stranger; a woman. In Jewish culture, strict rabbis had nothing to do with women in public; he wouldn't even speak to his own wife or daughter in public. In fact, some were called "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" because they shut their eyes every time they saw a woman on the street and ended up walking into walls. We may find this disturbing, but that's the way it was. So, the fact that Jesus stayed right there when a woman arrived... that was unusual.

But this was not just a woman; this was a Samaritan woman. Even more scandalous for the reasons I already mentioned. But not just a Samaritan woman; this was a Samaritan woman of questionable reputation. Women of that time went to the well twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. Why? Because it was cool. Drawing water was hard work, so they avoided the heat of the noonday sun. Besides, this was their fellowship opportunity. Women came in groups, caught up on the latest gossip, talked, laughed, shared together. Literally, the local watering hole was where relationships were celebrated and strengthened.

Now, when did our woman come to the well? At noon, the hottest time of the day. Hmmmm... that's odd. Perhaps even more telling, she was alone. The text hints that she was a social outcast. Why? Read ahead and you find out. She was promiscuous. She had had sexual relations with at least six different men and was presently in an affair with a man not her husband. It's too bad that such behavior today would not be considered that shocking. But back then this was a huge deal. Whether a prostitute or an adulteress, this woman was living a life that broke God's rules and broke the rules of her community. And for it, she was shunned. She came to the well alone. It is a pathetic scene: a poor, isolated woman trudging to the well in the heat of the day, head down, avoiding the stares and jibes of the people... just trying to survive.

So what is the point for our story? The point is Jesus stayed. It was bad enough that Jesus was in Samaria, but to remain alone with this woman... a sexually disreputable Samaritan woman... unthinkable! He should have stood up and

stormed away in righteous indignation, but he didn't. He stayed right where he was.

How do you account for that? What quality in Jesus caused him to remain with a woman who so flagrantly broke the rules of her culture? And, when you think about it, it broke his rules! Remember this is God with flesh on... the Logos, the creator of all things. This is the guy who invented sex and the rules that made it life-giving.

Jesus was available. Now that someone has shown up, what else do we see in Jesus? Acceptance. It was the sweet grace of Jesus that allowed him to receive a person right where she was. He did not make her change before she came to him. He did not require a certain degree of moral purity before he would be seen with "sinners" as they were known. Jesus was available to all people, and he accepted them right where they were.

It is very easy for outsiders to get the impression that the church is a closed shop, that in order to belong you must have it all together. It's the club where the holy people hang out. Those of us actually in the church, we know what a joke this really is. Every one of us is a sinner. Not one of us doesn't have stuff crammed into the closet of their lives... stuff that we would be ashamed if anyone ever found out. I say this to every new member class: there are things I have done in my past that, if you knew them, you might not want me to be your pastor. And there are things that you have in your past that, if I knew them, I might not want to be your pastor. But here we are. Every Sunday morning, every Thursday night, flawed and broken individuals in desperate need of a long drink from the well of God's Holy Spirit.

You have non-Christian friends who cannot believe it possible that you or your church would be willing to accept them just as they are. I prayed Thursday with a man who relapsed, yet again, and sat there weeping in shame for his failure, yet again. He couldn't believe that he would be welcomed into our offices to pray. Two men in my own LifeGroup have faced significant legal challenges. One of them is in prison. And we still love and stand with them. Too many folks cannot believe that they don't have to get their lives straightened out, clean up their act, put on their best front, before they can be seen anywhere near a church. Nope, gotta clean up their act first.

If we required getting your life cleaned up before you walk through our doors, we would have a very empty church. And we would not be treating people the way Jesus did. Availability. Acceptance. That is Jesus' way. So are you willing to walk across the room? To take out your ear plugs? Who is the person in your life who seems least likely to be open to God. Can you think of someone? Would you start by praying for them this week? Offering God your availability, and your non-judgmental acceptance? Would you try this week? And then watch and see what

the Spirit of Jesus might do through you? There are tired, thirsty, lonely, broken, ashamed, forsaken people all around you. Are you willing?

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Explain verse 4. Technically, Jesus did not "have to" go through Samaria to get to Galilee. He could have gone around. What do you think John meant?
  2. Why were the Samaritans and Jews enemies? This isn't the only time that Jesus interacted with Samaritans. Can you think of others? Who are the Samaritans in your life and what does this suggest to you about how you should view and treat them?
  3. Pastor Mark mentioned "Availability" and "Acceptance" as the first two qualities of the "new" evangelism. What did he mean by each of those? How do they speak into your life?