

Sowing for the Harvest

John 4:1-42

John 4: 35 **"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!**

36 "And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

37 "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'

38 "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

One of the things I have enjoyed about being in the Grand Valley here is all of the crops they grow here. Harvest time has been enjoyable with all the fresh fruits and vegetables. The harvest is continuing into the fall with apples and pumpkins and such. Harvest time takes a lot of preparation and a lot of work. But harvest time brings great joy when you can see the fruit of your labor.

Kathy and I have had the opportunity to be in a few of your homes since we have arrived here. As I said before we still want to come and visit with each family personally so we can get to know you and love you more. And now that the distractions of searching for a home and moving are over with, we plan to visit with all of you soon. Do you want to know what I have found so far as we have visited and I have gotten to walk around our neighborhoods and drive through the countryside? You know what I see? *The harvest*. I believe God is giving me a glimpse of our community through the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we saw from the Gospel Matthew that Jesus went through all the towns and villages and **"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'**" (Matthew 9:36-38) I have seen the harvest field. I see people everywhere, people who need the Lord. Have you seen the harvest field? Many are ripe and ready for the harvest. People need the Lord.

And what is more than that, people really want a relationship with God. I have yet to meet a person here in Grand Junction who really down deep does not desire to have a relationship with God.

But you might be thinking, "Okay preacher I see that there are all these lost people out there, the harvest field is full. But what does that have to do with me? Are these people my responsibility? And if they are, what can I really do to make a difference?

Well, I've got good news for you today. You can make a difference. I want to show you some simple principles from God's word that will help you sow the seeds of God's Word and God's love with people. This lesson comes in the form of a story. John chapter 4 tells the story of harvest, but it begins with the story of just one woman who met Jesus. Jesus asks her for a drink of water. Then Jesus offers to her living water! The story takes place in Samaria, at a well dug in ancient times by Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob was even buried nearby.

The Samaritans and the Jews had a centuries-old feud that centered on religious judgment. Over 700 years before Jesus, the Israelites living in Samaria had been conquered by the Assyrians. Most of the people had been carried off into captivity.

Those who remained in the land committed (in the opinion of the Jews) the unforgivable act of inter-marrying with the foreigners who moved in. This made the Samaritan descendants totally unacceptable to the racially pure Jews of Galilee and Judea. When the Jews returned after the exile to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, it was the Samaritans that led the opposition to the rebuilding. Jews and Samaritans came to hate one another.

As Jesus and His disciples approach the city of Sychar, Jesus stops at Jacob's well. He sends His disciples into the town to buy some food. It's noon, the sun is high in the sky, and Jesus is thirsty. Down the road from Sychar comes one lonely woman, carrying a couple of large earthen pots and watching her feet as she walks; apparently deep in thought, but not observant of any of her surroundings. Just going to the well, alone, to fetch some water for her house.

Jesus and the woman at the well—they met from two different worlds. They shared a moment of conversation. It led to a drink of living water for the woman, to a harvest of souls from her town. And it has some lessons for us about sowing for the harvest in our community today.

Lessons as we sow for the harvest:

I. Sowing means GOING, NOT WAITING (1-6).

John 4:4 says, “**But He needed to go through Samaria.**”

John doesn't tell us why Jesus had to go through Samaria. But Jesus “**had**” to go. Really, no good Jew “**had**” to go through Samaria. The ethnic and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans had been erected for hundreds of years. And they only worsened through the centuries, so much so that many Jews would not pass through Samaria on the path between Judea and Galilee. They would often go east, cross the Jordan River, go north or south, bypass Samaria, and then cross the Jordan again when they neared their destination. That's how bad it was. They would rather double their journey than meet up with Samaritans.

Yet Jesus had to go through Samaria. He teaches us a lesson here, that is...sowing means GOING anywhere and everywhere that someone needs Jesus.

A family was in vacation in Montana visiting the grandparents, and when the grandmother drove her car past a church in the small town, she pointed to it, told the children that it was the First Baptist Church. “It must be a franchise,” her eight-year-old grandson said. “We've got one of those in our town too.”

Well, there are Baptist churches all around, that is for sure. But let me ask you this question...Does the world need another Baptist church?

That's a thought-provoking question being asked by a Baptist preacher, isn't it?

After all the Lord has called me to four different churches with the name Baptist in them—I am fairly committed to being a Southern Baptist.

Let me switch gears for a moment...

Do you remember that poem by Robert Frost called “The Road Less Traveled”?

Part of it goes like this...

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no foot had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way

I doubted if I should ever come back

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere in ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
Took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

What I want to suggest to you this morning, is that this is the kind of church that is needed in this world... What the world needs is not just another church, not even just another Baptist church, but a church that is willing to take the road less traveled (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus always took the road less traveled. In our story he took the road to Samaria because there was a woman who was in deep spiritual need. She was thirsty for God. There was a whole town that was lost, and Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost.

There are a lot of people that feel lost in today's world. They wander about looking for meaning. The Beatles used to sing a sad song about how lost and hopeless this world is. The lyrics say,

Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been,
Lives in a dream.
Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door,
Who is it for?

All the lonely people,
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people,
Where do they all belong?

Father McKenzie writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear,
No one comes near.
Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there,
What does he care?

All the lonely people,
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people,
Where do they all belong?

Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name,
Nobody came.
Father McKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave,
No one was saved.

All the lonely people,
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people,
Where do they all belong?

That is a song of pain. What they're asking is, "Does anyone care?" Most people, just like this woman at the well, put on a good front, but if you listen to them tell their stories, you will find almost all of them asking just one question "Does anybody care?"

And we who know Jesus know that the answer is "yes." God cares...and because God cares...we care. And because we care we ... GET THE GOOD NEWS OUT!

We have good news to tell! You know...there are a lot of churches that believe in the good news, and yet, they don't act on it. For sadly, the church that goes and shares the good news has become the road less traveled. Here is the challenge to us:

Are we going to be a church that actually gets the good news out?

Jesus is a great example to us in this, and in this story we learn how to get the good news out. Jesus took the road less traveled...Samaria. He did not choose the popular path. He did not choose the easy path. But He had to go through Samaria.

Jesus had to go in spite of the religious and social barriers. When the Lord gave us our commission, He described how it is to be done in Matthew 28. He said, "**Going, make disciples of all nations.**" As important as it is to gather for worship and teaching and fellowship with God's people, you can't sow the seed very well by sitting on a church pew. This means we are going to have to leave our comfort zone and get out there into a world of lost people.

Jesus went directly to where she was. Far too many churches have a Field of Dreams mentality, "Build it and they will come." The heartbreaking reality is that many people don't want to come to church and never will on their own. We cannot just write those people off to their own fate. The church must go to them.

Even great, loving churches can be guilty of the sin of being self-centered. If your vision of what God is doing in your church does not extend beyond these four walls, your vision is not from God. Jesus did not call us to "sit & sour" but to "stand & serve". Sowing means going, not waiting..

Second,

II. Sowing means **ENGAGING**, NOT FORCING (7-26).

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

Picture this lonely woman at the well. She lowers the bucket with the rope into the well. It bumps against the stones as it goes down, echoing back up with an empty, hollow sound... ..and finally, there comes the sound of water splashing as it finds the bottom.

The sloshing sound as she draws it back up is almost refreshing in itself against brightness of the noonday sun.

Suddenly this man who was virtually unnoticed by her until now, speaks and says, "**Give Me a drink**". She is astonished. Men didn't talk to women in public. It was considered beneath them. Even more, this was a Jew, and Jews didn't talk to Samaritans or have any dealings with them. And here was this Jew, a man; asking for a drink of water from a Samaritan; a woman.

Their eyes lock for just a moment. His eyes were full of compassion and peace and maybe just a hint of quiet delight. Hers were full of surprise and suspicion.

Then she looks back down toward her ascending bucket of water and almost mumbles in verse 9, "**How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?**"

There may have been a tone of sarcasm there. It seems to be implied in the wording; we don't know.

Jesus teaches us a wonderful lesson here and it is...

Sowing for the harvest means meeting people where they are and guiding them to the truth of the gospel. We need to let people know that we have something they need.

Just like Ted and Dorothy Husted of Wall, South Dakota. Let me tell you their story:

The depression took the fun out of 1932. It was no time to go into business. But Ted and Dorothy Husted bought the little drug store in their town. Grasshoppers had eaten all the crops in the region. This, in turn was followed by a dust bowl, a long drought, temperatures for ten days at a time of over 100 degrees. So the drugstore seemed about to fold.

Ted and Dorothy asked themselves: How can we get people into the drugstore?" They decided on the billboard marketing strategy...so, they went 25 miles in each direction and put up signs that read,

FREE ICE WATER AT THE WALL DRUG STORE, Wall, S.D.

They put up signs at 10 miles; and at 5 miles the sign read:

HOLD ON! IT'S ONLY 5 MILES TO THE WALL DRUG STORE AND FREE ICE WATER.

Even today 77 years later, as you drive across our great country you will find signs all over the country telling you just how far it is to free ice water at the Wall, S.D. drugstore. Today more than 15,000 people crowd this drugstore on a busy day in a town of 800 people. It remains the most spectacularly successful drugstore in the entire industry.

Listen to this, Druggists had been handing out free ice water for generations. But Ted & Dorothy were the first people who ever thought of using it to draw people in to their store.

Jesus found a way to start with a simple thing like a drink of water, and before long he was offering free water—living water to this woman. With this simple request, **"Give Me a drink"**, and with the resulting response, Jesus has drawn this woman into a conversation that she otherwise would have been terrified of starting herself, and using the water He draws her to Himself.

We don't have time to go into all the details this morning about all the things that were said, but Jesus led this woman from IGNORANCE, to INTEREST, to HONESTY, to FAITH.

The theme of this entire conversation centers around water. Jesus asks for it, then He offers it. He makes her aware of her own spiritual thirst, then He quenches it.

In verse 10 Jesus said to her, **"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."**

She doesn't understand. She heard Him use the word **"living"**! Didn't she wonder what He meant by the term, "Living water"?

No, she's still caught in the physical realm and thinking in physical terms. **"Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"**

Now He has her entirely engaged in conversation. He has made His offer and she has responded with a question; and a question invites an answer. It invites further conversation. She could have said, "You're made crazy by the sun. Leave me alone to draw my water", and gone back to her work. But she invited Him to speak further, so, He does.

He again steers her away from the physical to teach her spiritual things. In verse 13 Jesus says to her, **"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."**

Now she is interested. **"Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."**

Interested, but still ignorant. She still doesn't get it. Jesus wanted her to see how He could fill her spiritual thirst.

All through the scriptures water often has a spiritual meaning; always referring to life with God. In Psalm 42:1 the song writer says **"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God"**. Isaiah 12:3 says **"with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation"**, and Isaiah 35:6 gives the promise that **"...waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert"**.

Jeremiah 2:13 says, **"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."** And again Jeremiah 17:13 says, **"Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water."**

Prophecy of the New Jerusalem, Zechariah 14:8 says, **"On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter."**

Later in John 7, on the last day of the Feast of Booths, Jesus cries out the invitation, **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"**. And it says, **"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive."**

The living water is life with God through His Holy Spirit. Jesus has the woman's interest, and she wants what He has to offer, even though she does not yet understand what He has to give. But He has prepared the way for a very delicate issue that cannot be ignored. In order to go further, Jesus must address it. In verse 16 Jesus says, **"Go, call your husband, and come here."**

By this, Jesus is forcing her to make a decision. Be honest and tell Him the truth, or turn and go away, rejecting the gift He had to give, for the sake of keeping her private things private.

With you, or with the people you talk to it may not be adultery as in this woman's case. It may be something entirely different. But all of us must deal with our sin problem.

Here is the truth of the gospel: we cannot come to Jesus; we cannot receive eternal life from Him, without acknowledging our sin and repenting of it. Jesus must deal with that first. Sin is the real and insurmountable problem that all of us face.

The woman at the well opts for honesty. She may have suddenly become very interested in the dirt at her feet; maybe even thinking to herself that she hadn't noticed how dirty her feet were today, as in verse 17 she muttered, **"I have no husband"**.

She probably hoped He'd drop the issue and move on. After all, "I have no husband" could mean that her husband is dead. But she won't get off the hook that easily. Jesus commends her for her honesty. **"You have well said, 'I have no husband'..."** And He goes on to tell her things about her life that both shame her, and astound her that He could know, **"for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."**

Notice that Jesus does not condemn her, He only states the facts. But long before He ever talks about her sin, He offers to drink from her cup. Far too many Christians want to talk about the sin of other people from a lofty pedestal without offering to drink from their cup.

I can't read people's hearts, and I don't know the secret things in people's lives, but Jesus knows; and if we--after establishing a level of personal trust with someone, and making sure they know we care about them and we aren't there to judge or criticize--if we encourage them to repent of their sin, JESUS will deal with their hearts concerning the details, and by His Spirit He will grant repentance and faith to believe in Him.

At this point the woman tries to side track Jesus with an old argument that divides the Samaritans and the Jews. In verse 20 she says to this man she sees as a prophet, **"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship"**.

Folks will try to side track you too; and sometimes, when the Holy Spirit is dealing with something in your life, you may find yourself trying to change the subject too. But Jesus won't be sidetracked.

People get caught up in so many side issues. What's the right way to do this? When is the right time to do that? Does God accept this? Does He frown on that? But our questions are usually based in the physical realm, forgetting that as Jesus says in verse 24, **"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."**

How liberating these responses must have been to this woman. She is all too aware of her own pitiful condition and her shameful life. She is locked up under the Law, and knowing how helpless she has been to keep it; violating it daily, yet not knowing where to go for forgiveness; And here is this prophet, talking of living water, and true spiritual worship. Not making any demands of her except honesty and recognition of her need.

This is how Jesus deals with us, Christian, and it is how we should deal with others. Asking them only to be honest with themselves and recognize their need, then leading them to Jesus, the spring of living water.

The woman now begins to suspect that she is talking with some one who is much more than a dusty, weary traveler. He knows things about her life. He speaks with authority. He promises things no man can give. Could this be the Messiah? So she asks in verse 25, **"I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."**

His answer is interesting, in that it is the only time in the Gospel prior to His trials, that Jesus plainly tells someone who He is; and He says it to a Samaritan woman in a private conversation. **"I who speak to you am He."** "I AM" He says to her.

In a brief and very straightforward conversation, Jesus has gone from being the stranger needing water, to the Great I AM, who offers His own spiritual water, which quenches thirst eternally, and flows like a life-giving stream out of the innermost being. The next thing we see of the woman, she is leaving her water drawn from below, and running back to the village to tell everyone that she has found the Messiah.

When someone comes to a place of recognizing who Jesus is, and what it is He offers freely, and wanting it, the result is always that they are immediately changed!

This woman was an outcast in her community, sullen and quiet and lonely, unable to maintain a constant relationship, and by now probably devoid of any level of self-esteem. But she met Jesus. And in the space of a few minutes, He transformed her into a vibrant, excited, focused, determined witness of the truth!

I worry a little about Christians today--that it seems to be so easy to claim to be a believer and live as though it means nothing more than signing up for membership at Sam's Club or getting a City Market value card.

Have you really been to Jesus for the cleansing Power? Have you ever said you're sorry to God; and truly repented of sin? Have you acknowledged your sinfulness to Him and

accepted the offer of His gift of eternal life? Do you know what it is to worship Him in spirit and in truth?

You'll know when you have; and so will everyone else. Because you'll be running to them to tell, and they'll be heading out to see for themselves.

Sowing means engaging people a conversation that will lead them to the truth. It is setting aside cultural barriers and talking to people right where they are, in terms they understand. But we don't force the issue unduly, or bang them over the head, but instead exercise patience and let the relationship develop. Sowing means engaging, not forcing.

III. Sowing means LOVING, NOT PREJUDGING (27-30, 39-42).

(27) Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

I can just imagine this scene. The disciples had gone to get lunch and they come back and find Jesus breaking all the rules. And they are so shocked, they just stand there in silence. In that day and time the strictest rabbis would never even greet a woman in public, much less an immoral Samaritan woman. For Jesus to even talk to her was a radical gesture.

But rather than prejudging her like the disciples did, Jesus just loved her. People need love. They need acceptance. But God has a passionate love for people.

I like how Michael Card has said it in his song, "Violent Grace."

So ruthless, He loves us,
So reckless His embrace
To show relentless kindness
To a hardened human race.
The joy that was before Him
On the Man of Sorrows' face
And by His blood
He bought a violent grace.

God is so passionate about us, it is as if He is ruthless, reckless and relentless to see us become His children. That's powerful. That's love.

ILL Notebook: Evangelism (when tickets don't hurt)

In 1992, a Los Angeles county parking control officer came upon a brown Cadillac El Dorado illegally parked next to the curb on street sweeping day. The officer dutifully wrote out a ticket. The officer completely ignored the man seated behind the wheel of the car, as he reached in and placed the thirty-dollar ticket on the dashboard.

The man in the car made no excuses. He didn't argue or try to stop the officer and for good reason. For you see, unfortunately, the driver was dead. He had been shot in the head ten to twelve hours earlier but was sitting up, stiff as a board, slumped slightly forward with blood on his face.

The officer, preoccupied with ticket writing, said he was unaware of anything out of the ordinary. He got back in his car and drove off to the next illegally parked car.

I have always felt the church is much better in dealing with law than grace. What should catch our attention most about people is their need, not their offenses. What they need most is not our citations or our judgments; what they need most is our Savior.

IV. Sowing means SERVING, NOT SELF-SERVING (31-38).

(34) Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

Jesus says this because the disciples were preoccupied with lunch. They went into town to buy lunch and bring it back. But they find him talking to this woman! Once they regained their wits, their solution was rather simple, "Walk away Jesus and let's have something to eat."

But Jesus was more concerned about the needs of a town full of lost people than he was about his own need for food. He had a whole town to win to the truth. Rather than focusing on His hunger, he saw the opportunity for ministry. He saw the harvest field.

We have an urgent task. And (I know this is not a real Baptist-like thought, cause I know how we Baptists like our potluck dinners) but our task is even more urgent than eating. The point here is that Jesus is so committed to completing His work that He even refused to eat a meal when it interfered with God's work.

But to tell the truth... Sometimes, we are more interested in meeting our own needs.

We have got to set aside self-interest and get our priorities right. Jesus came not to be served but to serve. And so are we to serve.

Jesus calls us to serve and to engaging others with the truth. He came so that lost people would get unlost. You see, Jesus did not come just for the religious or the respectable. Nor did He come just for Caucasian, middle-class Americans. He is the Savior of the world. The field is ready for harvest, so why would we hold back the truth?

We tend to think that if we just get a person to a service or some other special event, that we have accomplished getting the good news out. But that is not Jesus' approach here. His approach was all about relationships. That is why after the Samaritan woman believes that he decides to stay in Samaria another two days (I bet the disciples were not really thrilled about that!).

In the same way, God has given us relationships with others. And I believe that the relationships we have with unbelievers are providential...that is, God has planned them.

Jesus can take a life that is empty and a soul that is thirsty and fill it with living water, a relationship with the living God. In verse 28 notice it says, "**The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, . . .**" She left her water jar because she had already found the living water. And she would never thirst again.

Have you met Him? Are you thirsty?

"IF ANY MAN IS THIRSTY, LET HIM COME TO ME AND DRINK. HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, AS THE SCRIPTURE SAID, 'FROM HIS INNERMOST BEING SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER'."