

Scripture:

Psalm 103

John 4:5-42

“Jesus, the teacher of grace.”

Of all the gospel I have to say ---- I have a soft spot for John’s gospel --- and this passage --- which only appears in John’s gospel is one of my favourites.

Perhaps I’ve shared this before ---- at home on the wall by my desk is small cork board and in the upper right hand corner is a picture of the interaction from John’s gospel this morning ----- Jesus and the woman at the well.

The mere words of ----- Jesus and the woman at the well ---- are a great comfort to me --- the grace He displays is an inspiration.

Jesus --- the most caring loving person --- the most graceful person who ever walked the earth ----- and this outcast woman --- this open receptive teachable and seeking woman ---- coming together at the local watering hole has always been a kind of blue print as to how we as Christians are to interact with people and share god’s love.

It’s a kind of blue print for how God approaches us.

As pastor Max Lucado put it ---- “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way.”

“God loves us just the way we are ----- but He loves us so much that He also refuses to leave us just as we are.”

God meets this woman --- loves this woman.

Jesus meets the woman at the well just the way she is --- but He also loves her enough not just to leave her that way ----- but to change her.

And that’s part of the reason I’ve always loved this passage ---- Jesus and the woman at the well is about graceful acceptance but it’s also about new life and growth ---- and combining those 2 things at just the right amount s is no east feat.

I've always seen this as a kind of mutually respectful and calm interaction between a seeker and a seer.

The coming together of a teachable spirit and a wise teacher ---- prophet.

That is until this past week.

The whole idea of this interaction being respectful --- reverent and polite ---- went right out the window for me this past week.

After reading a few commentators I hadn't encountered before --- and then reading Eugene Peterson's translation of the interaction ---- things changed.

And for the first time ---- I saw much less of a clam and mutually respectful interaction.

And instead I got a real sense of chippiness --- and lack of respect from the woman towards Jesus ----- at least initially.

She basically does to Jesus what we would now call ----- giving attitude.

And I think verses 19 and 20 from Eugene Peterson's the message demonstrate this perfectly ----- they read ---

“Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshipped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

The inflection is aggressive and cutting --- lacking respect even.

“Oh, so you're a prophet!

Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshipped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

It's snippy ---- in fact it's almost as though the woman is trying to trap Jesus.

She almost has an accusatory tone to her voice.

It's as if she's saying something like ----- "Well ----- if you're a prophet --- if you're so smart ---- how come Jews say Jerusalem is the only place for worship and yet my people have worshipped God right here for generations - --- aren't you then as a Jew saying my people have got it all wrong?

There is no benefit of the doubt here --- she is accusatory ----- almost trying to pigeon hole Jesus into an uncomfortable position or conclusion.

She takes the tone not of discussing and exploring and growing together --- instead she takes the tone of ---- "So are you saying that..." ---- "Are you telling me that...." --- "well we've done it this way --- are you saying we're wrong and you're better than us?"

We've all met these kinds of people right --- no matter what you say ---- you are made to feel that you also said something wrong --- or rude or hurtful --- or some combination of wrong --- rude and hurtful --- you are always the bad guy --- the bad person no matter what you say.

The woman --- at least initially --- takes the tone of this kind of person --- the always right kind of person --- who is hard done by ---- the one who always thinks they are right.

And Jesus being Jesus may have been the only person who ever could have made head way with this type of person.

This woman ---- the type of person who doesn't ever really want to ever take in new information --- or hear what you might have to say --- and instead really only ever wants to have one sided conversations --- gets a huge wake up when she tries her usual nonsense with the Son of God.

Jesus ---- the teacher of grace ----- manages to take this chippy attitude --- hard done by kind of person ---- to actually hear something new --- something that actually changes her disposition.

And Jesus comes to her from a very difficult situation.

It's not as though He's had an easy day or week ---- or is all rested up relaxed and ready to calmly deal with whatever may come His way.

He's come from an accusatory challenging situation and walked right into another difficult situation.

I could well understand if Jesus had of just cut her off and treated her far more curtly ---- but He doesn't ----- the teacher of grace ---as always lives out grace.

Just before our passage today in the first few verses of John 4 ----- we see that the Pharisees were griping about Jesus and how He was gaining popularity much to their dismay.

And so as verse 3 says --- Jesus left them --- "So he left Judea and went back to Galilee."

He'd had enough of their griping so He left them ---- went in another direction ---- didn't give them audience.

The Pharisees are griping about the fact that Jesus is gaining so many followers --- so much so that Jesus sees it best to simply move along --- and maybe circle back when they've cooled off a bit and might actually listen to Him with fresh ears and hearts.

So Jesus goes from that attitude to the accusatory chippy woman at the well.

And yet Jesus --- the teacher of grace ---- is able to turn things around and turn what could have been a combative conversation into a conversion moment.

Jesus is able to open people's hearts like no other --- going from combat to conversion.

And He's able to do this all because of God's grace working in and through Him.

This interaction at the well --- is chalked full of social and cultural layers that at best we can only ever approximate any kind of understanding.

There's the reality of Jews and Samaritan's coming together --- enemies --- a people at war.

There's the reality of a man talking to a woman in public --- in day light --- at the centre of town --- the watering hole ---- the town well.

And to really get the full cultural reality of men talking with women in public ----- consider these pieces of conventional wisdom that were current in Jesus' day:

“A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, on account of what others may say.”

“He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself.”

and -----

“If any man gives a woman a knowledge of God's Law, it is as though he had taught her lechery.”

Talking with a woman in public wasn't just a no-no ---- it was calling your respectability and motives into question.

And yet here's Jesus ----- talking in the wide open --- at the well --- the centre of town --- the most visible place in the whole town.

And yet here's Jesus not just talking with a woman in daylight at the centre of town --- but a Samaritan woman.

And here's Jesus not just talking with a woman in the light of day at the centre of town and a Samaritan woman ---- but He's also talking with her about God's will --- religious and spiritual matters.

Jesus doesn't just engage in idle chat with her --- the weather ---- spring training in Dunedin ---- the Stanley Cup play off race --- will the Leafs make it or not ----- does it really matter anyway ----- no ----- He's talking about living water --- spiritual thirst --- worshiping God in spirit and in truth ---- and before long they even get on to talk about the Messiah --- God's chosen one --- heavy stuff ---- the stuff that really matters in life.

We can't really grasp all of the cultural taboos ---- and unwritten and written rules that Jesus was breaking.

Jesus simply pushes aside things that for many would have presented themselves as barriers.

As hard as we may think it can be to talk about faith and share our faith ---- the challenges we have pale in comparison to what Jesus had to deal with in sharing God with this woman at the well.

And rather than get all caught up in these challenges – things would have held back a lesser person ---- Jesus just gets on with it and speaks the truth of God’s love.

Jesus --- the teacher of grace --- does it again.

If you want to know how to evangelize ----- how to share your faith --- how to turn a conversation from --- “Who’s going to make the playoffs? --- Or what’s the forecast?” ----- to what really matters in life --- forget about reading a book ---- or two ---- or three about it ---- turn to Jesus --- turn to John 4.

Jesus enters into a very hostile and volatile situation a Samaritan town.

And after having just left a volatile and hostile situation ----- respected authorities giving Him a hard time ----- He simply --- calmly ---- graciously --- and peacefully ----- talks with this woman despite the social taboos associated with it --- and despite the attitude she gives Him.

And by the end of it --- the woman is going about town sharing all these wonderful things about Him ----“testifying about Him” ----- as verse 39 says.

Jesus takes a volatile situation --- a volatile person and turns it --- her --- into an opportunity for change and growth ---- he takes a cranky accusatory person and turns her into someone positive and caring.

As one of the line’s in our video earlier said ----- “Let us seek to live and love like Jesus.”

“Let us seek to live and love like Jesus.”----- with grace.

The woman at well goes through an emotional roller coaster ride that day.

And Jesus very gracefully leads and guides her --- taking her softly from a bad attitude ----- from a confrontational and accusatory attitude to something beautiful and life giving for her whole town.

I can well imagine her day starting out rather ordinary --- time to go to the well and fetch some water ----- routine --- hum drum --- “Boring” ----- as my son would say --- “Boring dad.”

And then as she goes ---- she notices a man there ----- “Oh great --- what’s a man doing here ----- this could really slow me down and complicate things for me. --- What is he doing here?”

And then as she gets closer not just any man but a Jew --- the despised enemy of the Samaritan’s.

And then not only this ----- but this man actually speaks to her --- asking her for help.

And then not only this ----- but this man starts to speak all lofty and spiritually ---- and He doesn’t even have the common sense to have a bucket or anything to actually draw the water with --- who does He think He is? --- what is He doing? --- He doesn’t seem to know anything about how deep this well is or where it is actually located the history of this place what a fool.

And then --- to top it all off ----- this man starts to speak about her life in prophetic ways.

So she’s likely gone from the feeling of ----- “Here we go again --- off to the well.” --- business as usual --- hum drum ---- boring --- to a bit of alarm --- to more than just a bit of alarm --- to a whole lot of alarm --- to full out alarm ----- to heart opened up to something new --- to running through town sharing all about this man with the whole town.

She goes from boring --- to “wait a minute what’s happening here?” ----- to full out pull the fire alarm and call 911 in a very short period of time.

She goes from ----- to attitude and chippiness ----- to wait a minute He knows things about me that only a prophet could possibly ever know ----- to wait a minute I can learn from Him --- to hold on a minute He’s got

something I need ----- to wow ----- He's not only got something I need ---  
He's got something everybody in my whole village needs.

I've got to go and tell them all about Him.

Indeed she is so astonished that she drops her water jug and runs back to town.

Verse 28 reads ---- "Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?""

Her priorities shift dramatically and instantly --- she goes from herself --- water bucket and me --- daily chores to --- others --- everybody in town needs to hear this Good News --- my whole village must know that right here in our little village just might be the Messiah.

It's a miraculous little interaction if you think about it.

It's as miraculous as water out of a rock --- like we heard about last week In Exodus 17.

And it's just as miraculous as that ---- water from the stone --- Moses whacking the side of a stone in the middle of the desert only to have water come gushing out ---- it's as miraculous as that precisely because it never could have happened without God.

Without God it's unexplainable ---- impossible even ----- and that's what a miracle is --- an act of God that otherwise would have been impossible.

People's hearts are turned towards the gospel --- this woman's heart was turned to the gospel one regular day at the well in the centre of town --- all because of one conversation.

God is the active agent here --- and God is the active agent always.

Today ----- the third Sunday of Lent is a hinge point in our Lenten journey.

It is the Sunday ---- historically it is the Sunday where the focus shifts from primarily individual spiritual practices ----- like fasting --- and sacrificing ---



-- and giving things up --- to Christ's sacrifice --- specifically His sacrifice on the cross.

As we turn away from ourselves and what we may have given up or taken up ----- as we turn away from ourselves at this mid way point in Lent --- so we turn to the cross ---- and we are reminded that our ultimate deliverance doesn't depend on human strength.

Instead ----- our ultimate deliverance comes through Christ --- through the cross.

The saving of souls ----- conversion ---- evangelism --- sharing our faith --- spreading the faith ----- building up the kingdom of God doesn't ever happen relying on human strength.

Jesus walks into a very difficult situation with this woman at the well in Samaria --- and He ends up turning things around dramatically not just for her but for the whole village.

And it isn't human strength ----- or human ingenuity ---- or human cleverness ---- or human anything --- that enables this great and powerful change of heart in this woman and town.

It is divine intervention.

Through this divine act of intervention the woman's heart is transformed from chippiness and volatile accusatory tone ---- clip you at the knees attitude ----- to something beautiful and life giving.

She goes from accusing Jesus of something He hasn't even done ----- to sharing His saving love.

And the clincher is ---- when she moves from accusatory and negative to life giving and positive --- she wants her whole town to get in on it too.

She moves from a strictly inward personal selfish disposition ---- getting herself some water ---- to a far more outward communally focused disposition ----- sharing the living water with everyone in town.

Think for a minute.

Here she is off getting water ----- laying into the foreigner --- this Jew --- who has come to her town --- enemy territory ---- with no bucket ---- no idea what to do ---- a bit of a fool really --- she's off getting water and her day is interrupted by this rather disruptive person coming to her well ---- and then in an instant it all changes.

The next image we have of her ----- is her dropping her water jug to run and tell everyone in town about this amazing prophet --- perhaps even the Messiah ----- that she has met.

“Then leaving her water jar the woman went back to town to tell everyone what had happened ----- verse 28 recounts.

She drops what's in her hand and turns away from the one thing she had left the house to do ----- get water.

As John Calvin dais --- “God by sudden conversion subdued my heart to teachableness.”

God does that.

Grace does that.

Subdues our heart to teachableness.

If you want to ponder the power of the cross.

If you want to delve deep into the heart of Lent.

Ponder grace.

Grace teaches us ---- grace opens us up in ways we have never been opened up to before.

If you want to ponder the power of the cross.

If you want to delve deep into the heart of Lent.

Ponder Jesus the teacher of grace --- at the cross.

Lent 3 ----- the t 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Lent signals a shift away from us --- and to the cross.

Lent is not about determination or human effort --- it's about Divine Grace.

Today in John 4 we have a supreme act of grace --- lived out.

May we go away and ponder this interaction ----- the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

That's what happened at the well that day.

And that's what happened on the cross.

Amen.