

Abe Harder and Isaac Harms started us on this series two weeks ago. ** Slide_0

And the first three chapters of this Gospel are really stunning.

In chapter one John announces a new reality in the world –

the Word has become flesh and blood.

That was a shock to the Greeks and to the Jews, but especially to the Greeks.

Everyone knew – or thought they did –
that spirit / is higher than matter

and therefore the divine could never **really** / be in touch with this fallen world.

But God breaks all the rules.

It turns out that, as John tells us in 3:16,
God really does love this world.

In chapter two we have the wedding in Cana and Jesus first miracle.

Maybe it shouldn't surprise us that God breaks all the rules again.

He takes the cleansing water,
a symbol of **separation** / between the unholy pagans and God's holy people,
and turns it into wine.

Maybe the wine is a symbol / of another coming wedding feast / at the end of days.

Or maybe Jesus just wanted to be sure the celebration didn't end too early.

Whatever was going on there,

the father of the bride wasn't shamed / by running out of wine for his guests,
and Jesus reputation as a party lover / was firmly established.

In chapter three we get an introduction to the Holy Spirit.

Or really, we find out

just how difficult it is / for someone who has lived by the Law
and their own intelligence / to get their head and heart
around what God is really doing in this world.

*That which is born of the flesh – is flesh.
And that which is born of the Spirit – is Spirit.*

And then we come to chapter 4.

But what we might miss / in reading chapter three / is a very specific contrast.

How do we create contrast?

We hold two different things / side by side. **** Slide 1**

This is what John is doing in ch 3 and 4

The same thing Luke does / in chapter one of his gospel.

In Luke we have Zechariah in one hand, and the story of Mary in the other.

Zechariah – the well educated, probably wealthy man
is contrasted with Mary, the peasant girl.

It is the peasant girl who knows how to say “yes” to God.

Now here in John 3 and 4 John does something very similar.

The message is not ONLY In the words – it’s in the structure.

John writes chapter three to tell us about a very well educated man.

A doctor of the Law.

A Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin.

A wealthy and powerful man who comes to Jesus by night.

He has a lot to lose and so he chooses his moment carefully.

We don’t know the final outcome of that story, but Nicodemus does not confess Jesus as Lord.

Then in chapter four we get a very different story.

We are presented with the story of a social outcast,
a mixed blood Jew who is living in sin.

And this outcast is a Samaritan woman – a despised race that came into being during the exile.

This story introduces the heart of the change / between Old covenant and New.

And it is stunning, in part, because of its setting in Samaria.

God seems to like to crack open our well made boxes –
and in this Gospel he does it in chapter after chapter.

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So we start where Jesus starts.

He is in Judea, and has to get to Galilee. **** Slide 2**

There is no question about how to get there –
it's north, and one simply detours around Samaria.

The red line shows the path that every Jew would take.

So right away we know what path Jesus is NOT going to take.

He doesn't go around – he goes straight **through** Samaria.

Right from the start the disciples must be thinking – *what are we doing?*

But if they questioned Jesus, John doesn't tell us.

Why would Jews go around Samaria?

First, because Samaritans are enemies. It may not be entirely safe.

Second, because Samaritans are non-Jews. So if you are holy,

You can't touch them

You can't talk to them.

And you can't touch things that they touch.

Doing any of these things would make you ritually unclean.

SO the thing to do / is just to avoid the contact altogether.

We do something very similar in Christian circles without even thinking about it.

We don't go into bars.

We don't talk to prostitutes.

We don't drink or smoke.

Most of us would see these things or places or people as unclean.

Jesus just didn't live that way.

And it gets him into trouble all the time.

And we have to wonder – *did he just not get it?*

But if we have eyes to see – there is a perfectly good answer for all this.

And it's given to us in Matthew 15.

Jesus responds to the criticism of the elders with this word –

"It isn't what goes into a man that defiles him – but what comes out of him"

In other words, it isn't about the externals.
It's about the heart.

Jesus is just plain not worried about who he is seen with,
Who he talks to,
Or what touches him.

He is often in the wrong places and with the wrong people.

Why?
Because it's the sick who need the physician.

And our problem is that we have the wrong view of holiness.

We worry about ourselves – Jesus worries about **the other**.

And it isn't about the externals. It's about the heart.

We think we live by grace – a lot of the time we live by rules.

We worry that if we touch something unholy, we will become unholy.

But Jesus, full of the Spirit, knows that when he touches something unholy,
it becomes clean.

Because GREATER is he that is IN US
Than he that is in the world..

Do you believe that? /

And so this is what Jesus is all about, bringing healing to the world.

Light into darkness. This is John's big theme. /

And the secondary theme is from John 3.

We think WE are in control

We think that we know where the wind of the Spirit blows.

It's just not that simple.

If we follow Jesus he will take us beyond our comfort zones.

Outside the safe roadways of Judea – into Samaria.

And in this story Jesus is going to shake up our neat little boxes

And the ways we judge by external things rather than by the heart.

/

SO okay – Jesus and the disciples are in Samaria.

The poor disciples. They probably felt sorry for themselves.

Why did we hook up with this kooky rabbi anyway?

They have been walking since first light, maybe five or six hours,

They are all bagged.

It's noon and 45 degrees C – so no one is going to be using the well.

They leave Jesus, and they take the water bag with them.

After all, the well is in Samaria – they don't want to **touch** the water.

Off go the disciples.

The text says Jesus sat down ON the well. **** Slide 3 well**

It was a Roman well, well constructed and with a thick capstone on top.

The capstone is still there – about 18" thick, round like a doughnut.

The hole in the center is big enough for a bucket and that's all.

The capstone protects from children or animals falling in.

And Jesus is sitting ON the capstone.

Then along comes a Samaritan woman – in the middle of the day.

And this is *not normal*.

Women in the middle east go for water in the morning / and evening, and in groups.

This woman is alone and she is at the wrong time.

So we know she is a social outcast.

And by custom

As soon as she approaches, Jesus should leave.

SO this is what she is expecting.

Problem No. 1. He doesn't leave. And she comes forward anyway.

Problem No. 2. As a good Jew he should NOT talk to a Samaritan.

Problem No. 3. As a good rabbi he should NOT talk to a woman.

It is NOT a good idea for an evangelical pastor
to be seen on the street corner with the wrong kind of woman.

Jesus not only talks to her, he asks her for water,
so he would have to use her bucket.

It's all wrong.

And we are faced with this problem again, that Jesus does all the wrong things.

And she can't miss this – it must have been bizarre.

But there is a wonderful beauty in this exchange.

Here is the Creator of the world asking for a drink of water.

Talk about humility!

The Creator!

He could command the sea to flood the land!

He could command a river to spring up in the desert!

Humility is not a lesson we have learned very well.

We think we are fairly powerful.

And we are pretty well off -- mostly, and independent.

We don't really need each other.

And we assume that when we go out on mission
that we should go out with something to offer.

WE -- get to be in control. And we like it this way.

We have the services, the money, the resources, and the good news.

Who would not **want** to welcome us?

Daniel Niles, the Asian theologian and pastor, puts the problem like this:

One of the features of the life of the Christian community in the lands of Asia
is the number of institutions of service which belong to the community.

We run schools, hospitals, farms, etc.

But what we do not really understand / is that these institutions are not only
avenues of Christian service,
but also sources of secular strength.

Because of them, we can offer patronage, control employment, and sometimes make money.

The result is that the rest of the community learn to look on the Church with jealousy, sometimes with fear and sometimes with suspicion...

The only way to build love / between two people or two groups of people is to be so related to each other as to stand / in need / of each other.

The Christian community must serve.
It must ALSO be in a position where it NEEDS to be served....

He concludes : "The glory of the Lion / is the glory of the Lamb." ** Slide 4

The Lamb is vulnerable / and becomes a sacrifice for the world.

Jesus is vulnerable / and does not use the power *that is his right*.

At the well Jesus is meeting with a social outcast.

She has no status or power. She has everything against her.

Her gender – her ethnicity – her lifestyle.

By asking her for a drink of water
Jesus puts *himself* in a position of need and / **elevates / her**.

Now suddenly SHE has power.

SHE can show mercy – to Jesus. And she does.

And God loves mercy. ** Slide 5

Hosea 6:6

*I desire mercy / rather than sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God / more than burnt offerings.*

Is there a way / that you can show mercy / to Jesus?

/

God identifies with the small ones of the world.

It's crazy and upside down , this Gospel we say that we love.

It's good news for the fools, the outcasts, and the broken

bad news for the powerful.

Another peasant girl reminds us of the God we worship. Mary sings,

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors. Luke 1*

The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,

*And the weakness of God
is stronger than human strength. 1 Cor. 1*

Back to our story.

Jesus speaks to her. It's all wrong -- and she knows it.

So the first thing she suspects is / maybe he wants something from her?

She is asking two questions really –

*Why are you talking to me – a Samaritan?
And - why are you talking to me – a woman?*

Jesus avoids the question completely and states a problem.

Like saying, NEEP --wrong question.

You don't have enough information – let me fill you in.

- This isn't about ethnicity or nationality
- It's not about gender or sex.

IN other words –

OPEN your eyes!

This is WAY outside your way of seeing the world.

Beyond your wildest dreams.

So let me fill you in.

It's about **life** and **redemption** and the **hope of the world**.

It's about a new kingdom coming.

This little phrase "living water" is right out of Jeremiah and Zechariah.

And it is one of those pregnant phrases –

Say this to a Jew back then and they hear - "End times" (or "Left Behind Series")

And it carries us from this ordinary scene / around a dusty well
Into the big STORY / that has been unfolding since Abraham.

Jeremiah 17 reads like this, ** Slide 6

*LORD, you are the hope of Israel;
all who forsake you will be put to shame.
Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust
because they have forsaken the LORD,
the spring of living water.*

*Heal me, LORD,
and I will be healed;
save me
and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise. 12-14*

This passage is a promise of the coming Kingdom
and God's rule at the end of days.

It is the LORD who is living water.

So when the woman hears these words, she gets the hint.

She appeals to her own religion.

What she is saying / with her reference to Jacob / is something like this:

"Are you greater than Jacob, who gave us this well for our physical needs?"

"Are you greater than Moses, who gave us the Law for our spiritual needs?"

And so Jesus answers her.

And his answer / is beyond the answer an ordinary man could give.

*The water I give / will become an inner spring,
welling up to eternal life.*

He is saying to her / in no uncertain terms / that he is the Messiah.

He is saying,

I am the fulfillment / of the words of the prophet.

I am the body / of the new covenant itself.

And he takes the conversation to another place.

To a place of hope – something the Law *could not give*.

The Law can't give life – the Law only brings condemnation. **** Slide 7**

SHOCK NO. 1 – It's not about the Law.

The Law only brings condemnation. She knows all about condemnation.

She's had plenty of judgment.

She's been drinking from that dark well -all her life..

She understands shame. /

She understands pain and exclusion. /

Now suddenly this weird man is offering her living water.

He tells her what she already knows..

With this well, you have to keep returning.

But I have a source that will live -- *within you*.

What can she say?

Great! Let's have it then!

Bring it on Jesus – I'm ready!

And then suddenly we change gears.

"Call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband."

"That's true" says Jesus.

And then she changes the subject.

What would you do in this conversation?

I think most of us would come back to the marriage issue.

"Lady, you need to clean up your life."

Jesus doesn't do this.

She has had nothing but condemnation.

She's a broken woman.

Men have used her.

Women blame her.

But God – *LOVES her.*

She knows she isn't living by the Law.

She has given up trying.

So Jesus takes it to the real issue – the heart.

Mercy / is more important than sacrifice.

And no one will be justified by keeping the Law.

So what is her question here?

She says,

“Ok, so to get this living water I have to go to Jerusalem, right?”

I have to go to your church, right?

I know you Jews – it's all about following the rules and doing it right. **** Slide 8**

SHOCK NO.2 -- It's not about Church. Or denominations.

It's about JESUS.

He is the source of all life – *salvation, healing and peace.*

It's not about WHAT, or WHERE or even HOW – it's about WHO.

This woman was really – really mixed up.

She had grown up with religion.

She thought it was about being the right kind of person

In the right place

Doing it all the right way.

And Jesus has just sent that whole castle crashing down.

What a relief!

Do you know how much work it is
When everything depends on YOU?

She has never been able to get it right.

First, she was born the wrong gender.

Then she was born in the wrong place with the wrong parents.

And Jesus says – don't worry, *it really doesn't matter.*

It's not about you. **It's about ME.**

And then comes the revelation.

But before we go there, we need to skip over to the book of Judges chapter 5. **** Slide 9**

*"Tell of it, you who ride on tawny asses,
you who sit on rich carpets,
and you who walk by the way.*

*"To the sound of musicians at the watering places,
there they repeat the triumphs of Yahweh,
the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel." 5:10-11*

This is such a beautiful story.

This daughter of Abraham has not had an easy life.

And she had no way to expect what was going to happen on this day.

It's her birthday. The day she met her Savior.

She is standing by the watering hole listening to a song she has never heard.

Like a cool, refreshing breeze in the middle of this desert.

And her story is about to go from bleak and depressing /
to the status of Scripture.

All she has known of God is stories of a distant temple.

And the constant accusation / that *everything* about her is wrong.

(Men have wanted her body..
and suddenly here is a man who sees something beautiful inside.)

She has never known a God of love and mercy,

A personal God – one who loves her so much / he will lay down his life.

And suddenly at this dusty watering hole -- there is music.

Eight times in the Gospel of John Jesus reveals himself as the Eternal Creator.

Eight times we hear Jesus claim the Name of God, Yahweh.

Literally, "I AM that I AM."

I AM the Light of the world.

I AM the bread of life.

I AM the resurrection and the life.

I AM the way, the truth and the life...

And the very first time this revelation happens,

The very first time the secret is told

It's told to this weary /and broken woman / at the well. /

She says to Jesus,

"In Spirit and truth -- it's too complicated for me.

But when the Messiah comes,
then I'll figure this out."

And Jesus answers her, "I, the one speaking to you, **I AM**" ** Slide 10

*"Tell of it, you who ride on tawny asses,
you who sit on rich carpets,
and you who walk by the way.*

*"To the sound of musicians / at the watering places,
there they repeat / the triumphs of Yahweh,
the triumphs / of his peasantry / in Israel." 5:10-11*

And Hosea writes,

*Come, let us return to the Lord.
For he has torn us, but he will heal us;
He has wounded us, but he will bandage us.*

*He will revise us after two days,
he will raise us up on the third day,
That we may live before him. 6:1-2*

And she does – she returns to the Lord. *And she finds LIFE.*

/

Way back in verse 16 Jesus tells her to GO, BRING and COME..

And now she finally goes.

God has revealed himself, and she responds.

Nicodemus came in the night and made no confession,

She goes back to her village carrying the good news.

She becomes the first female Christian preacher.

And her story will be told until the Lord returns.

Somewhere around this point / the disciples have come back.

And boy – this is WAY outside their comfort zone.

And as they stand there / staring at the ground and shifting from foot to foot,

Jesus looks up the road to the village / at the small crowd being led by the new preacher.

And he says to his disciples,

“Open your eyes – the fields are ripe for harvest.

*Others have done the hard work/ and you get to reap the benefits.” ** Slide 11*

God / and the first Christian missionary / have been sowing in the hot sun.

There is a river flowing in the desert.

The doors of the Kingdom have opened wide.

And ordinary, broken people are entering.

The TRIUMPHS of Yahweh!!

And the words of Revelation 21 are coming to pass:

*‘He will wipe every tear / from their eyes.
There will be no more death’
or mourning / or crying or pain,
for the old order of things / has passed away.”*

*He who was seated on the throne said,
“I am making everything new!”*

We had a clue that this was coming.

Back in verse 23 we heard that God was busy **seeking** :

“seeking those who will worship in spirit and in truth”

People from every tribe and nation..

They aren't coming because they are looking for a good church!

They are hungry for LIFE – for healing and salvation.

For love and mercy.

In his other book John writes about the new Jerusalem:

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the
Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

*The city does not need the sun or the moon to
shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light,
and the Lamb is its lamp.*

Jesus is the light of the world.

And he is the light in every believer.

He is the source of the water that flows from us to others.

What is this building?

It's not a church. / WE are the church.

It's not a temple. / God doesn't live in buildings made with hands.

*The time is coming and now is
When those who worship the Father must worship in spirit and in truth.*

“Open your eyes!

The fields are ripe for harvest.”

We might have to break a few rules if we follow Jesus on his mission.

Things might not be very comfortable for us – we are used to very straight lines.

But HE is the Lord of the Church. / It's HIS mission – HIS call.

What will we do?

Our Father is doing the hard work – we only have to learn how to follow the plow.