

### **John 4:1-42**

*The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.*

*Now he had to go through Samaria. 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?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)*

*The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)*

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

*"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"*

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

*The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

*He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."*

*"I have no husband," she replied.*

*Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*

*"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."*

*Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

*The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

*Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

*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?"*

*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."*

*But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."*

*Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"*

*"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."*

*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.*

*They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."*

I saw a commercial this week for Sudafed. Somebody walks into a store and says they're congested. The pharmacist says "Aisle 5." Another person comes in with other cold symptoms and the pharmacist says, "Aisle 5." One after another, different people come in and are all told to go to Aisle 5. Finally the camera pans to Aisle 5 and every single shelf is filled with Sudafed, because it is a multi-symptom remedy.

This chapter is a bit like Aisle 5. The story of the Samaritan woman is one of the longest in the book of John. The author has taken an unusual amount of ink to tell it. It takes up a lot of shelf space. And we can come looking for a wide variety of topics and find that they are all addressed in this story. It's a multi-symptom remedy.

There are many themes that this passage touches on. It deals with what real worship looks like. It addresses gender issues. It speaks about evangelism issues and breaking down barriers. Any one of those themes would fill an entire sermon by itself. So how do you choose what should be the focus?

If we stick with the Sudafed analogy, when I go to buy cold medicine, I always look for the active ingredients – what’s most important in the chemical make up of the pill. There may be a long list of other things in it, lots of good additives and secondary medicines, but what I really care about is the main thing.

As I looked at this story and reflected on what would be the main thing John wanted to say, I came back again to what John has said this book is about. He is telling us these stories so that we will know that what we’ve heard about Jesus is true and we can know we have life in him. What are the things we can learn about Jesus in this story? Those are going to be the main ingredients.

What struck me most about this story is how it showcases one of the central truths of Christianity: The incarnation. Carne means meat or flesh, so in-carnation means “in the flesh.” It’s the concept of God taking on a human body.

That is a mystery. How could the God of the whole universe exist in a single place? How could the God of eternity have a lifespan? How could the all-powerful God be reduced to human capacity? The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard called it the ultimate paradox.

John just said “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He doesn’t give us any explanation of how such a paradox could happen. But in this story he gives us a vivid portrait of what it looked like. We get to see it in action.

We pick up the story just as Jesus has left Judea. The same Pharisees who have been grilling John the Baptist have now turned their attention to Jesus and his disciples. If they thought John was a problem, they now have an even bigger concern on their hands, because Jesus seems to be drawing even bigger crowds. There is a grass-roots movement that they find disturbing.

Jesus is not ready to get into that battle. That is for a later time, and he doesn’t want to make things happen prematurely. So he decides to move his operation back to Galilee.

The easiest way to travel between Judea and Galilee is through Samaria. Otherwise you have to go clear around out of your way. When you’re traveling by foot, that makes a big difference. Already that morning, Jesus and his disciples must have traveled at least 20 miles, if not more, which would be a good five to six hours straight of walking.

John tells us that they pull into Sychar about noon. And he tells us that Jesus is worn out. The miles of walking, probably some job related stress of the run-ins with the Pharisees have taxed his reserves. So he plops down next to Jacob’s well to catch his breath.

Incidentally, you can still visit that well today. The Greek Orthodox church has built a chapel over it, but it is still a functioning well and you can go there and get a drink if you want.

Something struck me about that verse. It was the natural way in which John told about the incident. “Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.” It was a very casual comment about Jesus’ road-weary condition, indicating there was nothing unusual about it.

But as natural as John made it sound, I found my reaction to be just the opposite. Wow. Jesus was tired. In the back of my mind I know Jesus experienced life like we do, but it seemed a little startling to see it in writing. When you’re building someone up as the Savior of the World, you generally don’t include details that would make them appear less impressive. You exaggerate their best qualities and downplay their frailties.

But Jesus *was* tired. Not only that, he was thirsty – thirsty enough to ask a strange woman for a drink. And he must have been hungry too, since his disciples went to buy food. He’s a bundle of human neediness sitting on the edge of that well.

We talk about Jesus being the Son of God, but we spend very little time looking at him in light of his favorite way of referring to himself – the Son of Man. He was fully human. His Godness did not alter the fact of his physical makeup. It didn’t give him super powers. Knowing Jesus was completely human should have some sort of impact on the way we think of him, but what? What difference does it make for us that Jesus was a human?

One thing I’m grateful for is that **his humanity relieves my false guilt**. It frees me from the burden of feeling like if I’m worn out, something is wrong with me.

Ironically, this was one of my most tired weeks I can remember. Too many late nights and early mornings, too much stress at work and busy activities at home left me feeling exhausted. You know you’re in trouble when you wake up tired.

My tendency is to feel like I need to push harder and tough it out. I know a pastor who gets only three hours of sleep a night. He’s constantly moving. I can look at people like that and start to think hey, I need to suck it up and be strong. And I hear Paul’s words in the back of my head saying, “Do not become weary of doing good.” It feels like the Christian thing to do is not let fatigue get you down.

It’s an age-old tendency in Christianity. Pete Scazzero writes,

One of the early church heresies was Docetism, the belief that Christ had not really become human because of the insurmountable difference between the divine and human world. Some, therefore, thought that Jesus only seemed to be human... While I did not intellectually believe such an unbiblical notion, my life in God did not back up what I professed. I ignored my human limits and ran myself ragged to do more and more for

God. I avoided negative feelings such as anger or depression as anti-God. I fell into the trap of living as if spending all day in prayer and the Word was more spiritual than cleaning the house, doing laundry or taking care of the kids.

Jesus gives me permission to let myself off the hook. He gives you permission to let yourself off the hook. Because when he was tired, what did he do? He sat down. He took a break. There wasn't a hint of an apology for staying behind. He knew what he needed most and he took it.

He didn't hesitate to ask for what he needed either. He was thirsty, so he asked for a drink. We often feel bad asking for help when we really need it. Jesus relieves us of that unnecessary guilt and says it is okay that we are only human. We can sit down without feeling like it is a luxury.

We don't even need to feel bad if sometimes we let other people do the work. It was the disciples who went to get the food. Jesus didn't have to be everywhere, doing everything. There's no guilt in our human limitations. We have enough guilt to deal with over things that we do that are really wrong. We don't need to compound our problems by feeling bad about over things that Jesus himself had to deal with.

Another thing we learn from Jesus is that **His humanity relates to my struggle**. He relates to our problems rather than judging us for them. Here this woman comes trudging out to the well, lugging the same jar she brings every day, sometimes more than once. Notice that Jesus doesn't jump immediately to his discussion of living water. He doesn't launch right into, "Yeah, well, that's sure gonna run out fast for you." First he says, "Wow, it's hot today isn't it? I'm sure thirsty too." He lets it be known that he shares something in common with this woman who is so different from him – they both have the basic need of water. He identifies with her.

My mom didn't get braces until she was 40. Growing up in a family of six kids, there was never money for that kind of thing. So, she didn't get them until she was an adult. When one of my great uncles found out she was getting braces, his comment to her was, "Don't you think that's a little vain?" It really made my mom question whether or not she should have done it. Then my grandpa found out she was getting braces. His response was such a contrast. He said, "I always wished I had been able to get braces. I'm so happy for you." That meant so much to my mom.

Instead of passing judgment on her, he related to her situation. That's what Jesus is able to do because of his humanity.

This woman at the well had many things that Jesus could point out and use as excuses to not have anything to do with her. She was a Samaritan, not a Jew. She was a woman, and men just did not talk to women in public in those days. She had been divorced five times. She was shacking up with a guy. And all those things will affect their interaction down the line. But instead of starting with those things, Jesus says, "I'm like you – I need water too." His humanity lets him identify with us.

**Heb 4:15**

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin.*

Jesus' experience shows how **His humanity reveals a path for me**. There's a way for me to get through life, and I know this because Jesus did it. His having been human gives me hope that it is possible to make it. Not only that, he provided us with an example, a path to follow. We are not plowing new ground in our life. We're like that Samaritan woman. We trudge out to the well, and we find Jesus already there waiting for us. He has walked out our steps ahead of us.

That means we can study what he modeled and find guidance and strength for how we go about facing life. We can see how he treated people, how he handled grief, what he did when he saw sin and error, how he encouraged people. And we can then incorporate that into our own lives.

Of course, any comparisons to him can be overwhelming. When my dad turned 33, he thought about the fact that it was the age Jesus is believed to have been when he was crucified. My dad started thinking about what he had done at that point compared to Christ, and he started to feel depressed.

That's not the desired outcome of looking at the example of Jesus. But we can look to how he lived and what seemed to sustain Jesus, and that was his clear sense of knowing what he was supposed to do and doing it. He told the disciples that finishing the work God had sent him to do was his hidden food, his fuel that really kept him going. He had a strong sense of where to invest his time and effort, and what would energize him in the long run.

One of our core values at New Day is that every Christian is a minister, everyone has God-given work to do. The path that Christ left for us involves discovering God's purpose for us and then working to fulfill it. And rather than that being a burden, it becomes the source of fuel that sustains us and carries us and helps us reach our full potential and maturity.

So it's vital that we remember the humanity of Jesus. It relieves my guilt, it shows how he relates to me and it reveals how I can move forward in my own situation.

As I said, though, this story is about incarnation. That means it isn't just about Jesus' humanity, it's also about what became flesh, that it was God in human form. If Jesus were only human, we would have nothing but a good example to follow. He wouldn't be our Savior.

This story makes it very clear that Jesus is more than just an ordinary human. His divinity matters on several levels.

### **His divinity rewards my search.**

Let's go back to that woman again. Day after day she goes through the same motions. Day after day she uses up the water and goes back to more. She's tired of doing the same thing over and over again. "Give me something better," she says to Jesus. "Give me something so I don't have to keep doing this."

We all have a jug in our hands that is empty, that we keep refilling over and over, and we go, "Is this all there is?" We're searching for individuality, searching for meaning, searching for hope and community.

Jesus knows that most of the time we aren't even aware how deep our search really goes. That woman thought she was only looking for water, but the more she talked to Jesus, the more she realized she wanted something more. Questions came out of her that she didn't even realize she'd been thinking about.

And Jesus was able to say, "What I have to offer gets to the heart of the matter, to your deepest desire that you can't even put into words."

Everybody keeps talking on the most basic level with Jesus, water, food and so on. But with him, water isn't just water and food isn't just food. His supply is infinite to quench thirst and feed hungers at the center of our being.

He can do that because **his divinity reaches my core**. We talked last week about how we can't pretend with him and put on a show. The Samaritan woman found that out in person. "Go get your husband." "Oh, I'm not married." A nice virtuous sounding response. But Jesus sees right through it.

Strangely enough, being exposed like that can be comforting. This woman was drawn to Jesus because of it. Here was someone who knew all her dirt and who didn't stop the conversation. She knew he didn't approve, especially since she had been caught in her white lie, but he didn't give up on the conversation either. Knowing she was known was what won her over.

It's more than knowing the facts about us. Jesus as God is able to understand us as our maker. It's a soul connection, and it grips us and lets us know that we matter. Despite our failings and our covering up our failings, Jesus pursues us and burrows into the very heart of our identity.

### **His divinity reorients my heart.**

All throughout this story, Jesus is going about the process of reorientation. He tells the woman, she's not thirsty for H<sub>2</sub>O, she's really needing a drink of spiritual water to quench her thirst. Then he says worship isn't about a place, it's about things like spirit and truth. He tells the disciples hunger isn't really about bread, it's about desiring to do God's will.

Their hearts are all reoriented, and it's based in his divinity. At one point the woman kind of dismisses Jesus' answer by saying, "Well, when the Messiah comes, I'm sure he'll straighten us all out on things." And Jesus says, "That's me."

Actually, the words there are "I Am." He echoes the way God identified himself to Israel – the great I Am. Jesus' divinity, present in his humanity is what infuses new meaning in everything. Nothing is what it seems on the surface anymore – Jesus reveals truth in new ways. And he reorients our hearts to be focused on the more important issues. It is his divinity that has the power to change us.

A few years ago, Karin and I went to see Bill Cosby perform at the Puyallup fair. He's hilarious and an incredible talent. The thing that amazed me most was to see this man in his sixties come out and sit on a stool in front of thousands of people and not have to leave that stool for two hours without anybody getting bored or antsy. He had this incredible power to captivate an audience.

I look at Jesus sitting there by the well, tired and thirsty. There wasn't much to him. He didn't even have a cup to get a drink. And yet he by himself is completely enough to captivate us. God in a human body, breakable like us, yet deep like that well to meet our every need.

The question then is, what are you wishing for from Jesus? Do you need to see more of his humanity, the way he identifies with you and your problems? Or are you needing to see more of his divinity – his power to change you? What empty jar are you bringing to him that needs to be filled? It could be a broken relationship, an unforgiven hurt, a habit you're trapped in, or just not being able to say "I need a break?"

Whatever your deepest wishes are today, Jesus can meet them in his incarnation. Paul put it best when he wrote these words:

**2 Corinthians 1:20**

*Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident.*