

July 11 – Leaders - John 4:1-29 The Wells we Dig

Read John 4:1-29

The Father is seeking worshippers. From start to finish this is a conversation about worship, about worth ship, to what we give ultimate worth. That Father is not seeking worshippers for his sake but for our sake.

1. Read Exodus 20: 1-17. It was Martin Luther who said we cannot break commandments 2-10 without first breaking commandment one. Reflect on a few of the commandments together asking what we would need to give ultimate worth to besides God to break this command? What impact does it have upon us, upon our society, when we foster such worth shipping?

These were the examples Tim gave in the sermon that may spark conversation:

Luther is saying you will become a society of overwork – a people who can't rest – can't take sabbath - when you ascribe ultimate worth to something other than me - You will become a people who solve problems with violence when you give ultimate worth to something other than me - Your relationships will be marred with covetousness, envy, jealousy, lack of commitment – when you give worth to things other than me - You will mishandle the truth to the determinant of society and relationships when you subscribe worth to things other than me.

2. Much of our understanding of this interaction rests upon the ways Jesus interacts with this woman that was so utterly different from cultural expectation. Recollect from the sermon what cultural expectations were present. What do we learn about the character of Jesus from the ways he didn't meet those expectations?

Again the relevant section of the sermon:

Even from these opening verses – the first century reader would be scandalized – well yes the shortest route from Judea to Galilee is through Samaria – but no self-respecting Jew would travel that way - The Samaritans were a people that came about when the Assyrians had conquered this area of Israel – deported all the people of note – and then they settled the land with five different conquered pagan nations – they soon intermarried with the remaining Israelites – creating a syncretistic faith of Judaism and paganism - they did away with all but a revision of the first five books of the Old Testament – they built a competing temple on mount gerizim– which the Jews later came and destroyed – to the Jewish people the Samaritans were racially and religiously impure – to touch anything that had been touched by a Samaritan was to become ritually unclean.

Along the way Jesus and the disciples find themselves at Jacob's well outside of the town of Sychar – a town of about 500 - He sends his disciples ahead to buy food and sits down at the well – along the road comes a Samaritan woman.

A Samaritan – a woman – the rabbi's forbade men to talk to a woman in public - even family members – in fact there was a group of Pharisees called the bruised and bloody – they wouldn't even look at a woman – if they saw a woman they would close their eyes – causing them to walk into buildings and trees – thus the name bruised and bleeding

Now the daily well visit was one of the most menial tasks the women of a village would perform – so they'd often do it as a group – make it a social occasion - early in the morning or later at night to avoid the heat of the day – but she's alone – at high noon – the hottest part of the day – the least likely time for anyone else to be there - there was even a well in town – this was on the outskirts - she goes way out of her way – she doesn't want to encounter anyone...

Later we discover the reason - she has had 5 husbands – and the man she is living with is not her husband. In a town of 500 – with strong traditional views on marriage - can you imagine what they must have thought of her - said about her – had treated her – In the woman of Samaria we have probably the most marginalized and rejected person – of a marginalized and rejected people.

What do we learn about his character? That Jesus is willing to cross every social, moral, religious, cultural barrier to extend love grace and forgiveness to others and invite them into the kingdom.

3. Read Jeremiah 2:1-2, 5-8, 11-13. There were two meanings for the phrase living water. First was moving water as opposed to still water. The second meaning arose from biblical passages like this. The woman of Samaria is thinking of the first meaning for a portion of the conversation, Jesus is trying to point her to this biblical meaning. From this passage what is it that Jesus is seeking to offer her?

Living water is what comes about through right relationship with the living God, a relationship brought about through seeing what God is worth and giving him what he is worth – that is true worth ship.

With God at the center of life there is the reality that all things are brought back into their proper place. Our disordered loves become ordered.

This will bubble up into eternal life – meaning that it can begin to reflect a reality that points to what all things would look like if indeed God were in charge.

4. In his query – go and call your husband and come back – Jesus seems to be inviting her to consider what she has given ultimate worth to in her life – where she may have dug a well in search of water and come up empty. As you reflect on your own life where have you perhaps dug a well and come up empty?

The quote from David Foster Wallace may help trigger reflection here.
“Everybody worships, this is without exception, and the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god to worship is that pretty much everything else you worship will eat you alive”

This will invite transparency – be prepared as a leader to chart a course toward that transparency by being at the ready to share your own reflection on this question.

5. In Jesus’ response to the woman in vs. 26 who is he revealing himself to be?

Not only that he is Messiah the one who has the authority to answer her question about the “where” of worship – but also that he is the – I AM – Yahweh – he invokes the divine name.

It is to him that he invites her to see that he has ultimate worth and to give him what he is worth – to find in him – as well as his “hour” (death and resurrection) her ultimate worth that will spring up in her to eternal life.

6. We become what we worship. Having begun to see who Jesus is what change do we see in the woman of Samaria? How are the disciples expressing that transformation in relation to the cultural expectations of their day? How does worship of God in Jesus change us?

Again the relevant section of the sermon to help your discussion:

Resting ultimate worth in him - in his hour -will bubble up in you to something glorious - something beautiful – something transformative

And we see that in her encounter with Jesus – don’t we – she is not the same woman at the end of this conversation as she was at the beginning - here is a woman who was so shunned - ostracized - brutalized that she is alone at high noon - going out of her way – could not bear to be around anyone else – what had she faced in town to bring her to that - but on the heels of this encounter she runs back into town to tell everyone – come - see the man who told me everything I ever did – more than even you know and gossip about - she has beheld and responded to his ultimate worth – and his love – his kindness – his forgiveness – his grace – has made her new.

We see this as well in the disciples – they go into a Samaritan town to buy food – no Jew would touch – let alone consume anything that had been handled by a Samaritan – and yes when they come back they are shocked he is speaking with a

woman – but they don't say anything – they don't point it out with a judgmental sneer – beholding his ultimate worth is making them new.

This past spring a group of little ter's went through N.T. Wright surprised by hope – and in the book he writes about the transformative impact of true worth ship.

He writes - One of the primary laws of human life is that you become what you worship - you reflect what you worship not only back to the object itself but also outward to the world

Those who worship money increasingly define themselves in terms of it and treat other people as creditors, debtors, partners, or customers, not as human beings.

Those who worship sex define themselves in terms of it, their preferences, their practices, their past histories, and increasingly treat other people as actual or potential sexual objects.

Those who worship power define themselves in terms of it and treat other people as either collaborators, competitors, or pawns.

You become what you worship – you reflect what you worship back to the object itself – but also outward to the world around – worship King Jesus – and we'll come to reflect the character of the king -- worship the one who loved those at the margins – and we will love those at the margins – worship the one who jumped over every barrier to show this woman love grace and forgiveness – and we will become the people who will jump over every barrier to show others love grace and forgiveness

We live in a society that only sees value in churches that are committed to matters of justice – care of the marginalized and poor – and sees worship and discipleship has having no real value – and so we as a church often feel the pressure to feel and act the same way. Now don't get me wrong those things are indeed central to the call of the gospel – things I want to see us grow in more and more as a church – but we cut that off from our worship and discipleship to our detriment – for it must be our worth ship that drives that gospel response – our love of God - that shapes our love of neighbour.

True worth ship will bubble up in us a fountain of living water unto eternal life - bubbling over to reflect the new creation – a new humanity – pointing to the glory of his kingdom come