

# John 4:1-26

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of John, chapter 4, verses 1 through 26. This can be found in the White Bibles on page 984.

Again, the scripture text is John 4, 1 to 26, on page 984 of the White Bibles. Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sachar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son, Joseph. Jacob's well was there.

So Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, give me a drink.

For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

[ 1 : 16 ] For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you the living water.

The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?

He gave us a well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock. Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that 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 will not be thirsty or have to come to draw water. Jesus said to her, go call your husband and come here.

[ 2 : 20 ] The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband, for you have five husbands, and the one that you now have is not your husband.

What you have said is true. The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him, God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he.

- [ 3 : 29 ] This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Thank you. Well, good morning, and welcome to Holy Trinity Church as we continue in our series in the Gospel of John.
- John, for its sheer literary brilliance, John's Gospel has been captivating readers through centuries.
- I mean, for literary reasons alone, it's worth reading. I'm struck by the colors available to him on a palette through which he communicates a full and rich picture of our Lord.
- Even the contrasting portraits and conversations that he paints. It was just a couple of weeks ago where we saw him in conversation with Nicodemus.
- And the vibrant colors with which John writes give us this urban scene on the heels of Jesus' disruption in a very crowded temple and a religious insider who comes to him at night and leaves in the dark because he does not yet comprehend the arrival of Jesus in regard to what he wants to present.
- [ 5 : 15 ] And now, side by side, another conversation in the contrast couldn't be any more clear. You're in a rural setting, desert-like, not in the crowds, but with a woman who is blooming with all of that flowering strength of a cacti.
- And it closes with not her being in the dark, but in the very fullness and in the light of day bringing an entire townspeople to be in discussion with Jesus and coming to understand who he is.
- I mean, for literary beauty alone, John points out to you and to me that there is great hope beyond a dependence upon a religion which will keep us in the dark.
- There is great hope that in him you have a relationship, that's today, a relationship like no other. We can forgive first-time readers of the text if they assume with any knowledge of the Old Testament that what we are reading today would culminate in a marriage, a relationship of marriage.
- I mean, after all, Israel's literature in the Old Testament is filled with boy meets girl. Boy meets girl at a well.
- [ 7 : 01 ] The boy who meets the girl at the well is moving toward a wedding and that couple plays a disproportionate role in the life of God's people.
- Moses met Zipporah at a well. And the way Exodus 2 tells the story, he came on the scene and made a very large first impression.
- Abraham's servant meets Rebekah at a well. And with the very words, give me a drink concludes that his Lord, Abraham's son, is now going to be entering into an arranged marriage.
- Jacob meets the shepherdess Rachel at a well. And Jacob is filled with all the youthful flutterings of a young man not in his fullness.
- And he weeps and he cries and it's love at first sight. Israel's history is replete with relationships that are unique by marriage.
- [ 8 : 27 ] And so if you have never read this story before, by verse seven, with any awareness of the Old Testament, you're wondering, here it comes again.
- Is the anticipated outcome marriage. But we've been reading John's Gospel. And we have seen that while Jesus celebrates marriage, even through his attendance at the wedding at Cana, he does not think that the relationship you and I ought to seek that is beyond all others is the happily married state.
- in fact, he chose the materiality of a wedding, a marriage, to usher in not a union with another, but a reuniting with God.
- The relationship, like no other, is the one that Jesus can give us with God. and the woman is going to find that.

Now, we just ought to pause, just with that macro picture laid out, because even as this last week I spoke with a career professional single who was speaking of the travails of walking through life on their own, and in some sense wondering, should my relationship longings be met by the actual pursuit of a marriage?

- [ 10 : 14 ] Thinking that somehow that would be the relationship like no other, and it would solve all my dilemmas. To which I had to remind him that there are many people living under the same roof that are not living well with one another.

Marriage in and of itself, given the suburban strength of the idea in our country over the decades, that this is what fulfills us all is an illusion.

So if you're single here today and you feel that marriage will solve it, you need to know that Jesus has something else on offer.

If you're married here today and you're disenchanted! with your expectations of what you ought to get from it, this passage grounds you again today.

So here it is, and Jesus has all the disadvantages in the text of having to make this woman, who you and I know much about, we know much about Jesus at this point, but about whom she knows nothing.

- [ 11 : 43 ] How will he communicate to her who he is, what he has on offer, when she views him as little more than an ordinary man?

Joan Osborne would have put it this way, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home.

That's what he presents as. In fact, he doesn't show in the opening setting, verses 1-6, he doesn't show anything that would make you think he has a relationship to give you that surpasses anything the world tells you will be ultimately satisfying.

Let me show you two things in those opening six verses. Jesus seems to be like us. He appears to be avoiding conflict at every turn.

Not something that we think a god would do, but something that any old guy is quite used to. It says that when he heard, verse 1, that the Pharisees knew he was making and baptizing more disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee, and he had to pass through Samaria.

- [ 13 : 08 ] In other words, he's like, I am out of town and I am on the country road. Why? Because I remember that when John was baptizing, just a chapter or two before, they hauled him in and asked him, by what authority do you think you're throwing your shingle out and doing a god thing which anyone can attend to?

Jesus, now quite aware, that if he is baptizing more, that is his disciples, then it won't be long before the city hall of religious leaders are on him and wanting to know by what authority are you doing this?

He looks like you, he looks like me, he says, you know what, I don't want any conflict, I'm out, I'm out, I'm a 30 year old man and I am out. Take me out of Jerusalem, put me on a road north, in fact, not the road by the Jordan where the trafficking hordes will be, take me through the middle, through the arid desert country, to a town called Sychar.

The other obvious indication that he looks just like us is that wonderful phrase there in verse 6, Jacob's well was there, so Jesus wearied as he was from his journey was sitting beside the well, or as the King James put it, sitting thusly.

this is an ordinary man by all appearances. He's tired, he needs sustenance, he's on a slow road, and then it says, a woman from Samaria came to draw water.

[ 15 : 01 ] water. You can almost see it, can't you, the scene. If you were filming this, you're filming Jesus, the man, and you're pulling up and away, and suddenly from this small, deserted, rural town, which many have left for the more populated urban centers, comes a solitary woman with a well, a jar on her head, and she is arriving, and she is going to meet Jesus, and she has no idea what you know about him.

How, then, will he, in this conversation, 7 to 26, reveal to her who he is, and that he actually has a relationship on offer?

That is unlike any other. Check out the opening line. As conversations go, it's an intriguing moment.

Verses 7 to 9, Jesus is the first to speak. Jesus said to her, give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan said to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria, for the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

[ 16 : 32 ] At first glance, his opening line to her is rather awkward, as many opening lines are.

Give me a drink. From our vantage point, 21st century, they come off very badly. We would have inserted ourselves, screen left to say, maybe think about trying another way.

The reason is, it sounds very patriarchal. It sounds entirely chauvinistic. It's the kind of thing a man says to a woman when he's trying to assert some measure of power over her.

Control. Do this for me. And yet, we're 21st century readers. And it's almost as if John the writer already understands, you know, centuries from now, down in Hyde Park, they're going to take a swing at this text, and they're going to get the wrong idea if I don't put in my own parenthetical!

note. The parenthetical note is that, in one sense, the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. In other words, from this vantage point, there's just some information that you need to know.

[ 17 : 51 ] She was not offended by that opening line. You may be, she wasn't. And the reason she wasn't, was she was actually curious and engaged that he would speak to her given the cultural disparity and the ethnic division and the religious isolation that had grown up over centuries between Jews who lived in the South and tried to get it all right from Jerusalem and Samaritans who were part of their family in the distant past but who got hauled off to Assyria and only returned to intermarry with all kinds of people that didn't care whether you were trying to follow God or not.

And so she's aware that for all practical purposes there was an unwritten code of silence. If he was patriarchal, if he was chauvinistic, if Jesus wanted to exert a measure of control over this woman, he would have said nothing and offered no help.

And so she says, wow, to what do I owe this pleasure? In other words, the opening lines in 7 to 9 actually are promising.

But they give way to this conversational dance, that's what I'm going to call it, a conversational dance in 10 through 15, which really is challenging.

I mean, you talk about trying to establish a relationship with another person through conversation, this is tough sledding. because while verse 7, give me a drink, is not offensive to her, you can be sure that what he says in verse 10, she took affront to.

[ 19 : 55 ] Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. Now, that is problematic.

hey, unknown woman, you got any idea who I am? I just came from down there in Judea and Jerusalem and it's all a stir over me.

In fact, if you knew who I was, you would ask me for something really big because I could walk into your life and deliver. She really has that sense, he talks about living water.

You can almost feel the questioning and now she's on her heels, now she's going to dig in, now she knows, oh, he is a man like the men I know because she says to him, you got nothing to draw water with, this well's deep, I've never been there but I hear today it's still 30 feet deep and then she says, are you greater than our father Jacob?

who gave us this well and drank from it himself? You can almost hear her, now she's a woman the way you want to raise your daughters to be.

[ 21 : 18 ] When a man says something that offensive, you want strong, independent thinking women who can say, and who do you think you are?

And are you somehow greater on the scene than the patriarch Jacob who actually provides this water that I've come for?

I mean in one sense she is giving now as good as she's taking. she doesn't want anything to do with them.

Now if it's just you and me there, this relationship's over. The conversation ends, game done. I remember John Lennon, I think it was, who, when the Beatles hit that moment of at one level, all we need is love, but then there came that moment where then they broke up.

When the Beatles hit that moment where their dreams, their aspirations for the world in which we were living were now hit in the face with the reality that it would not come to pass, Lennon actually says the dream is over.

[ 22 : 45 ] And I'm not just talking about the Beatles. I'm talking about this generational thing. It's over. And I gotta, we gotta, I personally gotta get down to so-called reality.

Okay, that's the woman. But it's rescued. It's rescued by what Jesus says next.

Verse 13 to 15, Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And the woman said, sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.

water. It is as though Jesus knew the words that would rescue an almost intractable moment for him as he tries to reveal himself to someone that he wants to see restored into a relationship with God.

[ 24 : 03 ] It is as though he takes her words on water and says to her, come on, don't misunderstand me.

I'm not talking about this water. This water is something that you and I have to come back to every day. When I told you that I have something to offer you that is living and life and refreshing and will bring hope to your desert-like isolation, I'm trying to talk about something beyond this world.

And it worked because her opening line there is, sir, give me this water.

It's almost like Emmylou Harris. Her lyrics, I was ready for love, I was ready for money, I was ready for the blood, I was ready for the honey, ready for the winning, ready for the bell, looking for the water from a deeper well, yeah, well, looking for the water from a deeper well.

He tapped in to her heart aspiration for something beyond the materiality of marriage and life and relationship. relationship. She said, I've been there, sir, give me that water, take me to that concert, I'll go backstage on that one.

[ 25 : 40 ] And so he rekindles within her. Could it be possible that the man I'm speaking to has something to offer me beyond the world in which I'm living?

But, I love her here, she's a woman that is well rooted. She actually closes out that line so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.

In other words, don't, I'm guarded, I just voiced quietly to you a heart aspiration, gosh, I hope there's something beyond what I'm getting out of this world, because then you know I wouldn't have to come here to do this thing in this world.

So the conversation moves from this opening line to this conversational dance that reveals a longing to now, verse 16 and following, all cards start coming out onto the table.

I mean, this conversation is now intimate in the best sense of the term. Jesus says to her, go, call your husband, and come here.

[ 27 : 06 ] Having voiced your desire for something beyond the relationships and the water of this world, go bring those relationships to me.

This is what Jesus actually would ask you to do. are you willing to think that you can bring into his presence all your relationships that are not meeting your ultimate heart longing?

are you willing to say, let us come to him and trust that he will sort it out?

She says, you're right in saying I have no husband. husband, he says, for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband.

What you have said is true. Nothing is said here pejoratively to insinuate that she is a person of disrepute other than our 21st century reading.

[ 28 : 34 ] The text doesn't say whether they all died. The text doesn't say whether she was abandoned. The text doesn't say whether she was beaten and had to get out. The text doesn't even say if the one she was with now is actually protecting her.

The text doesn't say all the things we insinuate. She just knows that I've been looking and I'm, well, man, I'm doing music today.

I don't even like this guy Bono and I still haven't found what I'm looking for. Kurt Vonnegut, the German comedian of a century ago, had this little skit.

He would come on the stage and the whole stage was just empty except for a solitary light on one side. The rest of the stage is dark.

And he comes on and he starts circling that light. Circling the light. Circling the light. Circling the light. And you can tell he's panicking, looking for something. Finally, a police officer comes on the stage and begins to watch, comes over to him, and he begins circling the light.

[ 29 : 37 ] And he says, what are you looking for? And Vonnegut says, I'm looking for the keys of my house. And the officer starts looking under the light. And finally he goes, are you sure you lost them here? He goes, no, I lost them over there, but this is the only light I got.

Some of you didn't even get that. You're going to have to listen to it online. It's so good, it can't be told twice.

What he's saying is, we return to the only light we have. That's what she was doing.

So now she's in. For the first time, Jesus has successfully navigated the terrain of explaining himself to someone that would have no clue that he had something to offer them other than what any other man in the world might offer.

And that's why the conversation goes the way it goes. The woman said, verse 19, I perceive you're a prophet. In other words, like, you're not like, you're not like other people.

[ 30 : 53 ] You're one of those, oh, oh, I see. You actually have a line with God. You know stuff about me that I haven't told you, and you've created in me a longing for something that actually goes beyond you.

You must be a holy man, a sky pilot. And she says to him, our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.

Jesus said to a woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain or in Jerusalem will you worship the father. You worship what you don't know. We worship what we know, salvation. It's from the Jews and the hour is coming and is now here when true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and truth for the father is seeking such people to worship him.

A ton of material there simply put like this. If you today are beginning to think that Jesus might offer you a relationship like no other, do not do what most people do and transfer that emerging hope and trust to a place in which through religion you will get it done.

See, people that are interested in exploring a relationship with God through Jesus can misstep by thinking you've got to go to a certain joint that actually becomes the mediating factor to get that done.

[ 32 : 28 ] No, says Jesus, you want back, you want a reuniting with God, it's done through the spirit and through truth. Now get this, in other words, there is no such thing as sacred space as being necessary for you to reconnect to God.

So, all the smells, all the bells, all the work, all the ritual, all the context into which you walk, Jesus says those are not the steps that take you back.

Or, conversely, if you want to retreat into yourself, if you want to create your own spiritual space, if you want to meditate yourself to neutrality, no, no, you don't do that.

You actually do it through the inward part that is connected to truth, to which she says, basically, I love this, she says, your sermon's been too long, preacher.

She says to him, well, I know that when the Messiah comes, he's gonna, he'll sort all that out. In other words, like, dude, you just lost me on that. I indicated a willingness, I asked a question to you, where do I go?

[ 33 : 50 ] Where do I go to get this underway? to where we go to church or where you guys go to church? And now she says, you're beyond me. You're beyond me, as all you preachers are anyway.

I'm sure when the real guy comes, he'll make it plain. And now, for the first moment, this extraordinary Jesus has, through the painstaking work of conversation, found his way to the moment when he can rightly tell her who he is in a way that she might be ready to receive.

And he says, I who speak to you am he. and I who preach to you would point you to him. you and I are all longing for the relationship that delivers like no other.

And this is the one that is ultimately fulfilling. It's the one in which every single adult is on their own two feet fully joyfully embraced in a union with the living God in ways that you can serve out with him and his people your life's aspirations.

[ 35 : 55 ] And you know that that's what happened because we're going to hear about it next week. But at that moment she is off to find her man. At that moment she had no fear of bringing that relationship into his presence and saying, all right, what are you going to do with this?

Where do we go from here? In our effort to reunite with God?

God. Well, let me shut it down. I love John for its literary beauty.

I love it more for its central figure love. That love. That delivers on what we need for life.

Perhaps today you know enough to simply say, Jesus, sit thusly with me for a while.

[ 37 : 14 ] that I might come to know who you are and that I might come to love what you love and that I might have the life that you offer.

Our Heavenly Father, we so treasure this woman who has been immortalized through John's palette of words.

She is us, we are her. Help us to dwell a while with Jesus that we might be satisfied until we sit everlastingly as his bride in his home enjoying his bounty.

In Christ's name, amen.