

Jesus-Shaped Ministry

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[0 : 00] Lord, may the words of my mouth and my ministry here be pleasing in your sight. Amen!
So, you've got yourself a new vicar. Well done.

! The question is, what's he gonna be like? What is he gonna bring to this amazing church? You know, an awful lot of work has gone into getting him and his family to Clevedon, for which we are very, very thankful. Thank you.

But what are we to expect? What are we to expect of my ministry here? And I'm beginning to get to know a few of you.

And some of you will have had a long, rich history with the church, and others will be very new. And that means many of you will experience good ministry, bad ministry, maybe ugly ministry.

Some of you will be deeply shaped by the ministry of this church, other churches. Others of you may be carrying bruises from ministries.

[1 : 15] Which raises the question, how do we judge what good Christian ministry is? Whether that's my ministry or any other ministry we might come across. And this is a really important question, because if you were here on Thursday, the bishop made it very clear that it's not my ministry.

It's our ministry. It's a ministry we're all involved in. So how are we going to gauge what it is that Jesus is asking us to do? And what that should look like? What is this? What is he doing?

Well, we are looking at this passage in John chapter 4. It's not a usual post-Easter passage. And in fact, this series about transforming encounters with Jesus, I've slightly added it in.

Because I wanted to share my thoughts with you about this amazing passage. Because in it, we see Jesus model a ministry that leads to transformation.

Jesus models a ministry that leads to transformation. And it's the moving story of the transformation of a woman. Now, it's particularly important that it is a woman.

[2 : 22] Because she stands for the hundreds of millions of women through the ages, and even today, who, because of their gender and the cultural expectations surrounding them, they are victims of injustice.

Misogyny, abuse. And I don't doubt there will be some here for whom that is their experience. And so this Samaritan woman is a representative for us.

And the portrait that John writes in this fourth chapter, it's a very sort of brief portrait. But it's amazing what you can draw out, the subtle hints about her situation, about her predicament in life.

The first thing is that we find that she comes to this well at noon, in the heat of the day. Why would she do that? Normally, you go to a well in the hot country in the cool of the day, and with others.

So immediately, we're suggested that in some way, she's isolated, she's been ostracized in some way. And indeed, of course, reading on, we find perhaps one of the reasons, perhaps one of the main reasons is, is that she's had five husbands.

[3 : 33] And so she lives with shame, shamed by others, and no doubt carrying a degree of shame herself. Now, too many male commentators, I should say, blame this woman for her situation, suggesting that she had some kind of licentious lifestyle.

That is hardly likely. More likely, she's been rejected by these men, because she couldn't conceive. And if you know anything about ancient cultures, then women had no rights at all.

And so without a husband, perhaps without a son, it was very difficult to survive. And so finding another man was actually sort of necessary for her. And not only that, she was a Samaritan woman.

And to her neighbours, the Jews, she would have been regarded as inferior. So she was also probably a victim of racial injustice as well, racial prejudice.

So this woman we're meeting is disempowered and marginalised in many ways. And we find that all just from these small details in the text.

[4 : 42] Some also think that she was a rather large lady. But that's only because she was a woman of Samaria. You'll have to get used to those. I'm sorry.

You'll have to get used to those. Now, where was I? Yes. So for many reasons, and many of not of her own making, she's in a bad place.

Life is rubbish. And of course, this isn't just limited to women. Perhaps life is rubbish for you, people you know, this morning.

Or perhaps there's areas of this woman's life that sort of resonate with you for some reason.

Something of her plight collides with your own. And yet, as you read on beyond the passage that Anthea read for us this morning, actually we see that by the end, she is transformed.

She rallies a whole town, men and women, to come and see Jesus. She's a woman of influence. She talks, people listen. She no longer lives in shame, but in freedom.

[5 : 53] There's no longer sadness, but joy. There's no longer loneliness, but love. She's loved. I wonder if you long for that kind of transformation in your own life.

The freedom, the love, the being known. So what happened to her? It's a simple Sunday school answer. She met Jesus.

But what's significant is the way that he ministered to her. Now, I've been using this word ministry already. Ministry simply means service. So Jesus served her.

And how did he do that? That's what we're going to spend a little bit of time examining this morning and pondering on. What I see is four qualities, four postures maybe, four ways that Jesus models for us, which is part of what, well, which is what leads her to transformation.

And so we're going to just explore these kind of four ingredients of Jesus' ministry this morning. So firstly, Jesus models a ministry that invites vulnerability.

[7 : 06] That invites vulnerability. And we find that in the verses five to nine. So first of all, we realize that Jesus is putting himself out there. He has gone to enemy territory.

He is in a foreign land and he puts himself in an uncomfortable position. He speaks to this woman. Now, that is countercultural where, in a culture where even making eye contact with a woman would have been frowned upon.

And then he goes further and expresses his own need to this woman who he's never met before. Asking her for water. He asks her to serve him.

He asks her to minister to him. And I think that it's this vulnerable posture that both allows and causes the woman to open up to Jesus.

There's a connection that's formed through this mutual vulnerability. And without that, you can only imagine it's just a man and a woman passing in a hot place. It just wouldn't have happened, would it?

[8 : 09] In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period.

In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. In that period. I've had to get in touch with my emotions.

I've had to discover them and get in touch with them. And I found some really rather uncomfortable stuff. Anger, jealousy, sorrow, hurt.

And it's an ongoing journey for me to accept this and give space to this in my life. And therefore, to accept my own need for help.

And as a family, well, we're complicated. Now, if your image of a vicar and his family is of a demure, quiet children sitting obediently on the front row, on the edge of their seats listening to their father's every words, then that's exactly who we are.

[9 : 24] No, no, no, sorry. Let me shatter that image for you now. We have a number of needs and a number of challenges. And at times that makes for something truly beautiful.

But a lot of the other times it makes for quite a lot of mess and quite a lot of hard work. But gloriously, part of our sense of God calling us to this place, to your church, to our church, which has been an incredibly strong sense from God that I'm happy to tell people about and talk about, is that sense that as a whole family, even me, is wanted because of all of who we are.

Perhaps especially the messy bits. And even that as we express our needs and receive from others, we will be a blessing to others and God will work through us.

Now, I recognise, if that sounds strange to you, it sounds crazy to me. OK? But I've got to believe it. And I think that's part of how God has called us as a family to be with you.

And I've found over the last about 25 years of doing church ministry, it's where people are willing to be vulnerable, to be open with difficulties, with weakness, with pain.

[10 : 45] And of course, that needs to happen in a safe place and with safe people. But that is where I have seen Jesus most at work and a deeper work of transformation happening.

And I expect that Jesus works the same here in Cleveland as he does everywhere else. So firstly, in this passage, we see Jesus modelling a ministry that invites vulnerability.

And secondly, we see him with a ministry that goes beyond physical needs, beyond the physical. This is in verses 10 to 15, if you are following or want to look it up later.

So Jesus starts, as I said, by asking for water. But then he takes this lady onto living water. Springs of water that well up to eternal life.

And we see this throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus, that he is very interested in people's physical needs. They're incredibly important to him.

[11 : 50] Whether that's the feeding of the 5,000. Whether that's the multitude of physical healings that he did. Whether it's even providing the missing wine for a wedding. But we always find that these point us to something beyond.

Into the realm of the kingdom of God. So I love the fact that this church is interested in people's whole lives.

Whether it's the Grieve World Cafe. Whether it's living life to the full. Investing in people's mental and emotional well-being. Whether it's caring for toddlers. Whether it's doing intervention work with children in schools.

Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. What we need to make sure though, is that those ministries, through those ministries, we are inviting people to drink God's living water.

Because as people of Jesus, this is our gift to those around us. And I know it's easier and certainly much more straightforward.

[12 : 54] And certainly more politically and socially acceptable. Just to meet the physical needs. But if we want to see God's deep transformation at work.

We will always be seeking, whatever we're doing, to be opening the window from the physical to the spiritual. As I say, this isn't always straightforward or easy.

And I'm not saying there's just the kind of formula to do it. Like if we just say the name of Jesus in the right place. Is that what I'll do? There's loads of different ways of doing that. And it's not about ticking a box. But I know there is an opportunity in every act of service to go beyond the physical.

We had a great evening on Thursday. Thank you for those who came along. Wonderful celebration. So many people have said, wow, that was brilliant. One of my friends came from Harrow. Stayed overnight. And unfortunately, wandering around Clevedon, fell over and fractured their wrists on Friday morning. Which is nasty. What a trip to Clevedon she had. But what was brilliant is I found out about this and got in touch with her.

[14 : 02] She was sent down to the minor injury unit. And she rang me up. She was quite joyful. I was like, what's going on? She said, oh, the nurse. She was brilliant. You know, once she found out that I'd come to this church service, she said, oh, I'm a Christian.

Can I pray for you? So she shut the door and prayed for her. And she was absolutely blown away by this. And in some sense, that put in perspective her current situation.

She opened the window to recognize that God was in it all. So that's just an example. And I should say, you know, ministry, it's a church ministry. It's a bit like an iceberg. The stuff that actually happens in church, that's just the tip of an iceberg.

Most ministry, certainly in Jesus' way, happens outside in your everyday lives through the encounters that you have, the people you already know.

There's opportunities waiting to happen. So Jesus invites vulnerability. He goes beyond the physical. And thirdly, he has a ministry that is prophetic.

[14 : 58] It is prophetic. This is verses 16 to 19. Jesus says to the woman, go call your husband. And come back. I have no husband, she replies.

Jesus says, you're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you've had five husbands. And the man you now have is not your husband. Can you imagine that? Whoa.

That grabs the attention, doesn't it? Yeah, uncomfortable, yes. But to be known and seen? Wow. And you'll notice that it isn't done by Jesus doing a thorough investigation, looking through all the paperwork or asking the local gossip.

No. It's a divine insight. And it cuts right through the heart of her life and the challenges that she's facing. And because of this, you know, she instantly recognizes that Jesus is a prophet, a man of God, who brings God's revelation into her life.

Now, prophetic ministry, which is what we're kind of talking about here, is something which I've come on quite a journey with.

[16:11] Earlier in my Christian life, I was deeply skeptical of this wishy-washy words from the Lord stuff, if I'm honest with you. Surely it was so subjective.

And, you know, what if we got it wrong? Couldn't we cause such damage, such danger? Oh, okay, it's okay for Jesus. He's the son of God, but me? But over time, and a little bit of humility, I've discovered that as much as I believe that good listening, counseling, generally good pastoral care is really important, I know that when people encounter God directly through a message that can only be from him, that's personal to them, it cuts through so many layers and goes straight to the heart. And it opens that person to the Lord being active and real in their lives, whether that person is a Christian or not yet a Christian.

So the prophetic is a gift God gives us for both evangelism, as we want to share Jesus, and also it's a real encouragement for those who already know Jesus.

I remember one occasion in a situation where there was someone who lost their spouse, very tragic circumstances.

[17:27] And the widow was very, the widow, I should say, was very kind of closed, very non-vulnerable, if you know what I mean. And I was driving to meet her, and I just thought, oh, Lord, how am I going to get through this closed-offness?

And I was praying, I think I prayed in tongues a little bit, and suddenly this question came into my mind. This question came into my mind, and I thought, that is from the Lord.

And indeed, as I sat down and chatted with this lady over a cup of tea, it's all right, I am a proper vicar, I will sit over a cup of tea, I asked her this question, and indeed, it's like an axe, it kind of split open the conversation, and it was clear that God was at work and was transforming and helping her.

So actually, I've come to this point in my life and my ministry, where I'm always looking for prophetic insights whenever I meet people. So I'm asking the Lord for messages, images, pictures, maybe a word of scripture that often seems to kind of come from nowhere.

Sometimes there's a sort of strangeness about it. I'm not sure if this is it, but I wasn't thinking about this on my own, sort of reason to bring into that situation. And that means I'm letting the Lord do the talking, not me.

[18:49] The prophetic gifts are hugely important in ministries that transform. It was important in Jesus' ministry. So whatever your experience of prophecy, and given that St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 says that above all, he would desire that people would prophesy, I wonder, is that something you'd like to grow in?

In fact, let's do something a bit brave here. Quick show of hands. Wherever you are on even understanding or experiencing this prophecy stuff, would you like to move forward in it?

Somehow grow in it, in your understanding and practicing it. Go on, quick show of hands.

Wonderful. No, no, no, keep your hands up. Keep your hands up. I'm going to pray. Lord, I pray that you might receive these expressions of desire to receive more of your prophetic gifting, however tentative, that you might pour out your Holy Spirit, you might gift your people for works of service, and be glorified through it.

Amen. You weren't expecting that, were you? There you go. Okay. So, a ministry that invites vulnerability, a ministry that takes people beyond the physical, a ministry that is prophetic, and finally, a ministry that is full of spirit and truth.

These are the final verses we heard Amphibia read. So, this woman's vision of religion is hampered by, let's call them cultural blind spots and practices.

[20:28] Where should I worship? What's right? What's wrong? Ah. Jesus says to her, a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in

truth.

They are the kind of worshipper the Father seeks. Now, as I've meditated on these verses, I've become rather arrested by the idea of worshipping in both spirit and in truth.

And it's made me realise how God has made us all so amazingly different. You'll know that for some of us, we're made to be quite intuitive people, experiencing people, sensing people.

We seek spiritual experiences. Maybe that's the way we've come into church, is through experience like that. And yet there are others who are much more kind of rational, analytical, researchers, evidence-based.

They are, if you like, truth-seekers. Jesus says the kind of worship his Father is seeking is worship in spirit and in truth.

[21 : 35] And he's given us the truth of his word to inform us about who God is and what he has done. But if we only read this book with intellectual or academic intent, it's only going to take us so far.

Similarly, if we pursue things spiritual, whether they are experiences or gifting, as we've just been praying for, without the word to interpret and define those experiences, we are going to, we're going to be led off into all sorts of weirdness and confusion.

So spirit and truth. Jesus invites one to shape the other. And so I wonder, for you this morning, which is it you need to lean into more?

Perhaps if you're someone who's naturally inclined to a good Bible study, can you set aside some time to just sit in silence, just wait on the Spirit of God? Or perhaps if you're someone who loves the song worship, why don't you just take some words that you love singing and do some research behind it, find the truth behind what we're singing about?

And it's interesting that even in this passage, as Jesus talks to this woman about spirit and truth, she's immediately drawn to declare what she believes about the Messiah, the coming Messiah, that he's coming and he's going to explain everything.

[23 : 00] And at that point, Jesus immediately reveals himself to her, declaring, I, the one who is speaking to you, I am he. And I wonder, is that your experience of worship?

However we do it, whatever form it takes, and as I say, a lot of it happens in everyday life, not just in this place, that as you search for the truth and in your own spirit, whether you've got doubts or questions, have you come to recognise that it is Jesus who is speaking to you and that it's him who it's all about?

I am he. And by his spirit and by his word, Jesus invites each of us into his kingdom, the place where he rules and reigns.

And the way into that kingdom is through his cross and resurrection, dying to our old selves, passing on to him our shame, having our sins forgiven, and then receiving from him those living waters that spring up into eternal life and bring us freedom.

And as we join us in his kingdom, and a number of us have been part of his kingdom for years, praise the Lord, he is inviting us to be the person he has created us to be, which somehow still includes all our weaknesses.

[24 : 30] And he also invites us to do the things that he does, to join in with his ministry, offering that water of life to others, meeting the needs of others, both physical, spiritual and emotional, speaking God's words to others prophetically, and also sharing in his suffering.

And so as we come into land now, I hope that you will continue to pray for me. I know you have been praying for me and my family so faithfully, thank you. But continue to pray for me as your vicar, that my ministry, as well as the ministry of this church, will be shaped by these ingredients, that we will be inviting, vulnerability, go beyond the physical, be prophetic, full of the spirit of truth. And of course, the many other ingredients that we find through the Gospels as we watch the amazing ministry of Jesus. That is what I am about as a vicar, as I smack my microphone.

But of course, the good news is you don't actually need a vicar. I mean, the last 20 months have probably pretty much proved that because we can come straight to Jesus. We can come straight to Jesus.

He is here by his spirit and has been speaking truth, his reality, to us already this morning. So my question to you, what do you need from him right now?

[26 : 00] What is it you need from Jesus? He is here, as it were. You are sat by that well with him. What is it you need from him right now? Perhaps you know you need more of that living water that

he is offering to quench that thirst that goes beyond any drink on earth can give.

Perhaps you, like the woman, carry shame, guilt, maybe not of your own making and you know you desperately want that to be washed away.

Perhaps you are here and you realise you want to go deeper in worship and spirit and truth.

Perhaps you just simply want to see this new season as one where you want to be empowered to do Jesus' ministry and we can't do that without the Holy Spirit.

I just invite you to open yourself to him. He's here and he will meet you even in the most uncomfortable places in your life. Perhaps particularly in those places. But he won't force his way in.

You just need to let him in. So if there's a crack in the door this morning would you let him in?

Because he went as far as death to bring you living water and he longs to speak heaven's words into your life right now.

[27 : 16] Pouring out his gift of his spirit and his truth to guide you in life to make you a true worshipper and to shape you to be like Jesus. So come Holy Spirit pour out yourself amongst us.

Just as he did with the woman at the well he wants to bring transformation through his love and his presence with you. So no matter how difficult the situation or the ugliness or the thing that you're drawn to bring before him invite him in.

If I can invite the band to begin to make their way back up onto the chance to make to make a way to make a way to the way to the way to!