Pursuing the Outsider

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Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0:00] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me, if you have a Bible, to John chapter 4. And as you turn there, let's pray.

Lord, that is our prayer, what we have just sung this morning, that you would be changing us from glory into glory. We pray that we would know your love for us. We pray that we would see your deep love for us in this passage that we're looking at this morning in particular.
Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight. For you are our rock and our redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen. John chapter 4. I'll be starting at verse 1, reading through verse 42.
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 Sychar, 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.
[1:20] It was about the sixth hour, that is noon. 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?
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 living water.
The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the 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 will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.
[2:28] The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water. Jesus said to her, go, call your husband and come here.

The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband for you have had five husbands and the one 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.
[3:30] 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 was called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, what do you seek or why are you talking with her?

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So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? They went out of the town and were coming to him.
Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about. So the disciples said to one another, has anyone brought him something to eat?
Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Don't you say there are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.
[4:33] Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps.

I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them. And he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe.
For we have heard for ourselves. And we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world. So this winter leading up to Easter, we are going through the first half of the Gospel of John.
And in these chapters that we're in, chapters 3, 4, and 5, we have a series of four fascinating conversations between Jesus and four different people. A couple weeks ago we saw Jesus talking with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader in Jerusalem.
[5:44] At the end of chapter 4, Jesus speaks with a royal official in Capernaum. In chapter 5, he meets a disabled man at the pool of Bethesda. And here he meets a woman at the well in Samaria.

And so we see that Jesus interacts with all different kinds of people. The healthy and the sick. The well-educated and the illiterate. Honored leaders and despised outcasts.
Jews and non-Jews. Men and women. And today I want us to just take a closer look at this fascinating conversation between Jesus and this woman.
So I want us to consider and reflect on each of the main characters in the story. First, I want us to look at Jesus and how he pursues the Samaritan woman.
Second, I want to look at the Samaritan woman and how she responds to Jesus. And third, I want to look at Jesus' disciples and what he's trying to teach them and us through the process.
[6:46] But first, let's consider the character of Jesus in this story. Now, verses 1 to 3, we learn that Jesus' ministry is going well. He's gathering more followers.

And Jesus is on the road from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. And then verse 4 makes an interesting statement. It says, and he had to pass through Samaria.
Now, there were three roads that you could take if you were going from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. You could take the western road that went by the Mediterranean Sea. You could take the eastern road that went by the Dead Sea.
Or you could take the central road that went along the ridge through Samaria. And almost everybody took this central road because it was much shorter, much more direct than the other routes.
But John doesn't just say, Jesus happened to be going through Samaria just like everybody else did. He says he had to go through Samaria. And that verb translated had to or sometimes must is a key verb in the Gospel of John.
[7:46] And actually in all of the Gospels. And it consistently refers to God's deliberate purpose or God's saving plan.

And so the same verb appears in chapter 3 when Jesus says to Nicodemus, You must be born again. You have to be born again. The Son of Man must be lifted up. Or later in this chapter, Jesus says, Those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth.
And so when we read, Jesus had to pass through Samaria. We're supposed to be reminded that all along the way, Jesus is acting in line with God the Father's deliberate purpose and his saving plan.
And so as this story unfolds, we're seeing God's plan unfold. There's a purpose for which Jesus is passing through Samaria. And we're going to see that as the story goes on.

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Now verses 5 and 6 set the stage for what's going to happen. It's noontime, which means it's getting close to the hottest part of the day. Jesus, understandably tired because he's probably walked all morning, sits down by a well.
[8:53] But it's not just any well. It's Jacob's well. Now you can actually go and visit Jacob's well today. It's been preserved 2,000 years later. It's a historic site. There's still water 100 feet down at the bottom of it.

But a woman from Samaria arrives on the scene. Now, John the Gospel writer was very familiar with the Old Testament. And the way he sets the scene might remind people who are very familiar with the Old Testament of a couple of episodes in the Old Testament, particularly from the life of the patriarchs.
So here's a couple of examples that this story sort of echoes. Genesis 24, Abraham sends his servant on a journey to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac.
The servant comes to a well where he asks a woman for a drink. That woman, Rebecca, ends up marrying Isaac. In Genesis 29, Jacob himself, who the well is named after, arrives at a well at noontime.
And there he meets Rachel, who becomes his future wife. In Exodus 2, Moses sits down by a well in Midian, exhausted from his travels. And there he meets his future wife.
[10:07] So in all these stories, God in his providence leads one of the patriarchs of Israel to a virtuous and godly woman who would become a mother in Israel.

And now Jesus sits down at the well, named after one of those very patriarchs, at noon, exhausted from his travels. And here comes a woman on her way to draw water. And Jesus says, give me a drink.
And so you might wonder, what's happening here? Maybe this will be a virtuous and godly woman. Maybe she'll respond positively to Jesus.
Maybe she'll immediately become one of his disciples. But the story doesn't start that way. Her initial response to Jesus is not at all positive. It's not at all welcoming.
What we see is that three, there are at least three, there are three major barriers that separate this woman from Jesus. And in order to reach this woman, Jesus has to overcome each of these barriers.
[11:10] So the first barrier that becomes evident is an ethnic barrier. The barrier between Jews and Samaritans in that day. She says, the first thing she says to Jesus is, wait a minute, how is it that you, a Jew, are asking me for a drink?

For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, John reminds us. And the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans had stretched back for centuries. It wasn't a new conflict.
No, it had centuries of history behind it. So back in the day, Samaria was the old capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, while the Davidic dynasty continued in the south.
After the northern kingdom collapsed, there was a mixed group of people who resettled that area around Samaria. And they mixed the worship of the God of Israel with the worship of various other deities.
And so the rest of the Jews had seen the Samaritans as being in theological and religious error. By that time, the Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, nothing else.
[12:17] And instead of worshiping in Jerusalem, they had built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, where they said that was the right place to worship. And there was the...

So there were political differences, there were theological differences, there was even occasional violence. And we still have records of a couple of these violent incidents. So in 128 BC, the Jewish high priest destroyed the Samaritan temple.
Around 8 AD, a group of Samaritans defiled the Jewish temple in the middle of Passover, the biggest holiday. And then later on, in 52 AD, some Samaritans killed several Jewish pilgrims who were traveling through Samaria.
So there was a lot of tension here, right? There were these ethnically different groups, plus there was some political tension, plus there were religious differences. And so that was enough to make most Jews and Samaritans simply keep their distance from one another, right?
Jesus' disciples would go through Samaria, because it was the fastest way to go, and they might buy food there, but they would never sit down to a meal with Samaritans.

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[13:26] But Jesus is different. Jesus isn't put off by the ethnic differences. And he didn't avoid conversation with somebody who probably held some different political and religious views.

Now, Jesus didn't agree with all the Samaritans' views. In verse 22, Jesus even says salvation is from the Jews. In other words, God's plan and God's promise had worked itself out through the Old Testament through the line of David, through the Jewish line.
But what we see is that Jesus met the Samaritan woman on her turf. He came to where she was. He didn't wait for her to find him where he was. No, he honored her by asking her for help, by being willing to receive a human kindness from her, a cup of water on a hot day.
And he offered her something far better than any temple could provide. He said, I have living water, a fresh running supply of God's goodness and faithfulness that wells up within your soul.
Jesus had come to be the new temple, better than the one in Jerusalem, better than the one on Mount Gerizim, the place where people could meet and come into the presence of God. So that's the first barrier that Jesus faced is the ethnic barrier.
[14:47] But in addition to the ethnic barrier, there was a gender barrier. Both the woman in verse 9 and later on Jesus' disciples thought it was strange for Jesus as a male teacher to be having a serious conversation with a woman.

Back then, the general consensus was that Jewish men, especially rabbis, should avoid all unnecessary conversation with women except for one's own wife or close relatives.
Because, they thought, talking with women could lead to temptation or it could give a man a bad reputation or perhaps it was simply a waste of time. But Jesus did not see women in general as threats or problems or distractions to be avoided.
No, some women traveled with Jesus and provided for him out of their own means. Mary and Martha were Jesus' friends. He ate with them. He taught them. He wept with them.
And Jesus ministered to women who were hurting. Now, Jesus' motives, Jesus' words, Jesus' conduct were entirely pure and respectful. Right?
[15:55] This whole conversation took place in plain sight. There was nothing hidden behind closed doors. But Jesus initiated a conversation with this woman even at some risk of being misunderstood.

I mean, think about this woman's history with men. She didn't have a great track record of happy relationships with men. She had had five marriages end.
Now, perhaps she was widowed sometimes. But it's likely that she had been divorced at least once. Now, she was living with man number six who wasn't even married to her.
When Jesus asked her for a drink, her initial response is rude and cynical. What does he want from me? Is Jesus really any different than all the other men I've ever known? They just want what they want and then they go along their way.
But Jesus wasn't like all the other men that she had ever known. Jesus wasn't trying to use her and he didn't just avoid her.
[16:58] Jesus honored her by treating her as a human being. By relating to her and seeing her as a hurting sinner who needed a savior. So, Jesus reached across the ethnic barrier.

He reached across the gender barrier. But third, there's another barrier that Jesus confronts and that's a moral barrier. You might think, why did this woman come alone to the well at the hottest, most uncomfortable part of the day?
When the sun is blazing straight down upon your head and there was no shade around the well. Well, almost certainly she wanted to avoid interacting with the other women who came early in the morning and later in the evening or in the afternoon.
You see, her reputation in the village had been ruined. She was an outcast. She was seen as a shameful moral failure by anyone's standards back then, Jewish or Samaritan.
Five failed marriages. And a sixth cohabiting relationship represented a failure to live up to the moral law of God. And in verses 16 to 18, Jesus exposes that moral barrier.
[18:14] He brings that reality to the surface. He wants her to know that he is not ignorant of her messy past. But Jesus also provides a way through that barrier.

Jesus offers her something far better than any husband could ever give. He offers her the gift of God. Forgiveness of sins and fullness of life.
Jesus offers a way for her, a Samaritan, a woman, a sinner, to come into the presence of the one true God. He says in verse 23, which is sort of the climax of the conversation, the hour is coming

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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. You see, Jesus has made a way for us to worship God the Father. He himself is the truth. Later on in John, he'll say, I am the truth.
And he's promised the spirit. That's what it means to worship in spirit and in truth. With the spirit that Jesus gives and according to the truth that's in Jesus. Jesus is making a way for this woman.
[19:25] Through all those barriers to come into the presence of God. To be a true worshiper. And that's why Jesus had to go through Samaria. Right? Verse, the beginning of the chapter, we're wondering, why does Jesus have to go there?

What's God's purpose in sending him there? And verse 23 shows us the answer. God the Father was seeking out this woman all along. And he sent Jesus to break through all these barriers.
So that she might be reconciled to God the Father and become a true worshiper of God. That she would turn from the broken cisterns that could hold no water.
To the fountain of living water. In God himself. So Jesus crossed all these barriers so that this woman could become a true worshiper of God.
So that she could join the true family of God. So that's what we see about Jesus and how he initiates with this woman. But now let's consider the woman. Let's consider her journey.
[20:28] Let's consider her response to Jesus. Notice how the woman's attitude toward Jesus changes over the course of the conversation. And I think there's sort of three parts.

At first, her attitude is rude and dismissive. In verse 9 and verse 11. Right? At first she basically says, Why are you talking to me?
Do you even know who I am? And then verse 11. She basically says, Are you greater than our father Jacob? Who do you think you are? Of course you're not greater than Jacob.
The person who this well was named after. But as Jesus continues talking about living water, Her attitude shifts from being rude and dismissive to being curious and open.
Verse 15. She says, Sir, give me this water. So that I won't be thirsty. Or have to keep coming here to draw water. Now, at this point, it's not clear what exactly she thinks Jesus is offering.
[21:31] Maybe she thinks he's offering some kind of magical water source that will save her from having to make daily trips to the well. So, it's probably not totally clear to her what Jesus is offering.

But whatever it is that Jesus is offering, she's at least willing to give it a try. She's open. And curious. Now, I wonder if you can identify with either of these two postures toward Jesus.
Maybe there's a part of you that responds to Jesus with cynicism and skepticism, like the woman did at the beginning. Maybe like this woman, you've been hurt, rejected, used, or ignored.
Maybe it's not easy to trust anybody. But Jesus isn't put off by the woman's cynicism and rudeness. He's patient.
He's gracious. He is completely sincere. And he continues to hold out his promise. To you.
Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.
[22:42] But whoever drinks of the water I give will never be thirsty forever. The water that I give will become a spring of water within you, welling up to eternal life.

That's the promise Jesus is holding out. Or maybe you're feeling drawn to Jesus. Maybe you're feeling some of that openness and that curiosity.
Or you find yourself wanting to experience more. Whatever it is that Jesus has to offer. Okay, Jesus, give me this water. Now, when the woman says that, Jesus responds in an unexpected way. Right? What does he say in the next verse? Verse 16. He says, asked her to call her husband. She says that she has none. And he says that she's had five. Sometimes Jesus brings to the surface a part of our lives that we feel deeply ashamed about.
An area where deep down we know that we have failed or fallen short. An area that we might prefer to never talk about with anybody else ever again.
[23:56] But Jesus wants us to know that he knows. Jesus wants us to know that he's not making his offer to us of living water on the basis of us appearing morally put together on the outside.

No, Jesus offers salvation and living water to people who know that before God they have failed and fallen short.
Jesus knows us all the way down. And he loves us anyway. And that's a truth that if we truly receive, that can transform us from the inside out.
That Jesus knows us all the way down. And he loves us just the same anyway. And that's what brings the woman beyond openness and curiosity to her third posture toward Jesus, which is

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trusting and testifying.
She's gone from being rude and dismissive to being open and curious and finally trusting and testifying. Verse 19 is her first profession of faith. She says, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.
[25:07] Now that's not the end of this. Now that's not all that Jesus is, but that's a true statement. And in fact, that's what the Samaritans were looking for.

Because if you read the first five books of the Bible, Deuteronomy ends with a statement that there hasn't been any prophet like Moses ever since then. And so the Samaritans were looking for another prophet like Moses.
And so when she says, I perceive you're a prophet, she's expressing that maybe he's the one who her people were hoping for. And then in verse 29, she goes back into town and says to her people, Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.
Could he be? Could this be the Messiah? The Christ? And verse 39 says that her testimony led many more from her town to believe in Jesus and confess that he was indeed the Savior of the world.
Now trusting in Jesus, as we see here, it didn't immediately remove all of her questions. She had a question about which temple to worship in.
[26:12] And over time, her understanding of who Jesus was would be deepened and clarified. But here's the question. Have you come to the point of turning and trusting in Jesus as the Savior of the world and as your Savior?

Verse 28 is a picture of what that looks like. She leaves her water jar behind and goes into town. And she can't stop speaking to people about Jesus.
The thirsty woman became a well, overflowing with the fullness of life that she had tasted and experienced and found in Jesus. So that's the woman in her process of responding to Jesus, from being rude and dismissive, to being open and curious, to trusting and testifying.
But third, there's one more set of characters in this story, and that's Jesus' disciples. What does Jesus want his disciples to learn from this whole process, this whole conversation?
Now for most of the story, Jesus' disciples are absent. They went into town to buy some lunch. But in verse 27, they come back. And in verse 31 to 38, Jesus talks with them, and he basically says two things.
[27:31] He basically says, in verses 31 to 34, he says, my greatest delight is to accomplish what God the Father has sent me to do. That is to seek out people to become true worshipers.

And this woman has just become one of those true worshipers. So that's the first thing he says. My greatest delight is doing what the Father has sent me to do. And second, he says, now I want you to join with me in that work.
And he uses the analogy of reaping a spiritual harvest. Sowing and reaping. So Jesus is saying, my greatest delight is to do the Father's will, see people become true worshipers of God.
And I want you, my disciples, to join me in that process. So I want to close by speaking practically to those of us who are followers of Jesus.
What does it look like for us practically to participate in with Jesus in seeing people like the Samaritan woman who are far away from God come to know God and truly come to worship him?
[28:35] So a few practical things. Number one, be willing to become uncomfortable. Think about the situation Jesus walked into, right?

He went to meet this woman on her own turf, even though that involved going into unfamiliar and potentially hostile territory where Jesus would be in the minority ethnically, politically, and religiously.
He carried on a conversation with her during the hottest part of the day in a place that was not shaded from the heat of the sun when he was already hungry and thirsty and tired, and it's not clear whether she ever gave him the drink of water that he asked for in the beginning.
Right? This was not the most comfortable place to have a conversation with the sweat pouring down his brow. But brothers and sisters, know that Jesus by his Spirit goes with us and equips us in the midst of uncomfortable situations that force us to depend on him.
So, be willing to become uncomfortable. Second, show unfailing honor even while speaking hard truths. Now, as followers of Jesus, there will be times when it's right for us to challenge people's pre-existing religious assumptions or moral practices.

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[29:58] Right? We can't always just nod in approval of everything that everybody already believes or does. Sometimes we have to speak hard truths like Jesus did here.

Jesus says, you've had five husbands. The man you have now isn't your husband. Or he says, you worship what you don't know. Jesus spoke hard truths, but he also showed unfailing honor. Consider how Jesus honored the woman throughout this entire conversation. He honored her by asking her for help. By his willingness to receive a human kindness from her.
You know, sometimes I think we can be reluctant to receive any kind of help from anybody else because we don't want to feel indebted to others. But that can actually be an expression of pride. Acting like we don't want or need anything from other human beings. It's actually honoring when we can recognize and appreciate what others have to contribute to our lives.
[31:02] Even if that's something as simple as a drink of water on a hot day. Jesus honored her by recognizing and appreciating what she could offer as simply a fellow human being.

Jesus also honored her by not responding in kind to her rudeness and dismissiveness, but instead responding with patience and graciousness.
And Jesus also honored her in the way that he addressed her shameful moral failure. Notice that Jesus affirmed what she herself had acknowledged.
You are right in saying this, that you have no husband. He says, what you've said is true. So Jesus exposed her sin, but he didn't add one ounce of further shame.
So be willing to be uncomfortable. Show unfailing honor even while speaking hard truths. Third, speak about Jesus in simple and powerful ways. Jesus didn't begin by quoting from some obscure part of the Old Testament that the Samaritans didn't accept.
[32:10] He didn't begin by arguing that the Samaritans' political views were misguided. He didn't get sidetracked with a secondary matter. No, he began by asking her for a drink, and he said he could give her the water of life.

He used a simple image that powerfully conveyed what he had to offer. She asked him where people ought to worship. He told her about worshiping God in the spirit and in the truth.
You know, the Gospel of John is full of simple but powerful images of who Jesus is and what he offers. Here are just some of the images from the Gospel of John about who Jesus is and what he offers.
The word of God, the ladder to heaven, the new wine, the new temple, the living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the true vine.
You see, it begins with us listening carefully to God's word and listening carefully to the people we're talking with.
[33:10] And as we listen to God's word and listen to the people we're talking with, then God will show us ways that we can speak about who Jesus is and what he has to offer in simple but powerful ways.

Even maybe using some of these very images from the Bible itself. Fourth and finally, follow the Father's lead and trust his provision.
Verse 23 is still true. The Father is seeking out people to worship him. And sometimes we'll find that verse 38 is also true. Jesus says, Others have labored and you've entered into their labor. Basically, you're reaping the fruit and you didn't even do all the sowing. Sometimes our job will be to do the initial sowing. Sometimes our joy will be to be reaping some of the harvest.
But God always goes ahead of us. That's what Jesus is saying. God always goes ahead of us. Even into these uncomfortable places. Even into these challenging conversations.
[34:12] And he just asks us to follow where he leads and trust that he will provide for us along the way. See, that's what Jesus invites us as his disciples to do. So let's pray.

I want to close with a prayer that has two halves. In the first half, the refrain is, Deliver me, Jesus. Feel free to pray that out loud or pray that in your heart.
The second half of the prayer is, Jesus, I trust in you. So hear this prayer. Feel free to pray along with me as a prayer of deliverance and trust.
From the belief that I have to earn your love, deliver me, Jesus. From the false security that I have what it takes, deliver me, Jesus.
From the fear that trusting you will only leave me more destitute, deliver me, Jesus. From all suspicion of your words and promises, deliver me, Jesus.

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[35:29] From rebellion against childlike dependency on you, deliver me, Jesus. From refusals and reluctances in accepting your will, deliver me, Jesus.

From anxiety about the future, deliver me, Jesus. From resentment or excessive preoccupation with the past, deliver me, Jesus.
From restless self-seeking in the present moment, deliver me, Jesus. From disbelief in your love and presence, deliver me, Jesus. From the fear of being asked to give more than I have, deliver me, Jesus.
Here's the second part of the prayer. That you are continually holding me, sustaining me, and loving me. Jesus, I trust in you. That your love goes deeper than my sins and failings and transforms me. Jesus, I trust in you. That not knowing what tomorrow brings is an invitation to lean on you. Jesus, I trust in you. That you are with me in my suffering, and that my suffering, united to your own, will bear fruit in this life and in the next.
[36:51] Jesus, I trust in you. That you will not leave me as an orphan. That you are present in your church. Jesus, I trust in you.

That you will always hear me, and in your goodness always respond to me. Jesus, I trust in you. That you give me the grace to accept forgiveness and to forgive others.
Jesus, I trust in you. That you will give me all the strength I need for whatever you ask of me. Jesus, I trust in you. That you are my Lord and my God, and I am your beloved one.
Jesus, I trust in you. Amen.

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