

## “Witnessing at the Well”

Liturgical Date: Lent 3 (A)

Primary Text: St. John 4:5-30, 39-42

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Third Sunday in Lent, is the Gospel Lesson from St. John 4. The title of the sermon is “Witnessing at the Well”. JESUS INTERACTS WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB’S WELL SO THAT SHE, THE TOWNSPEOPLE, AND PEOPLE TODAY MAY KNOW HIM AND HOW TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT HIM.

As they will be for the next few Sundays, our Gospel reading was a long one. But it is an interesting one, is it not? The very fact that this exchange happened is interesting in itself. Jews and Samaritans did not get along. The Samaritans were people of Jewish decent that had intermarried with the Assyrians during a period of captivity (2 Kings 17:24-41). Shunned by Jews as compromisers and essentially “impure” they had built their own temple on Mt Gerizim around 400 BC. They only accepted the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, as Scripture. Many Jews would not even travel through Samaritan territory, even if it meant taking a longer route. But Jesus and His disciples are travelling through, and there is a reason for it.

Secondly, Jesus here is talking to a woman out in public. This was not something seen as proper and respectable, especially for a rabbi. We see the Disciples surprised reaction when they return from their mission to buy food in town (v8) as verse 27 says, “*They marveled that he was talking to a woman*”. So here Jesus is, speaking to Samaritan-a woman Samaritan at that. He is “witnessing at the well”. Why? The time had come to share the

good news with them as well. And we are to share the saving Gospel with all people too-not discriminating in whom we share it with, casting a wide net, because Jesus died for all and desires that all hear His message.

And this is the aspect of this text that I want to hone in on today. This encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well teaches us much about witnessing. Witnessing. Evangelism. These can be words that strike fear into the hearts of many Christians. We know that we are supposed to be doing it. We are supposed to (and really should look at it as “get to”) share with others about Jesus. I have found that most Christians know that we should be sharing our faith, but often times many regularly don’t. One of the main things people will say as to why they don’t is, “I would but I really don’t know how to go about it. What would I say? What shouldn’t I say?”

This is one of the reasons that about two years ago we had an in depth introduction to Evangelism in our Wednesday night study that look at both the theology behind it and putting it into practice. And if we think about it, what better way, what better model for witnessing do we have than our Lord and Master Jesus? We don’t have to guess what Jesus “would have done” when it comes to sharing with others about Himself and His mission. We can look to the pages of the Bible and see what He actually did!

Jesus witnessing to the woman at the well in John 4 is one of the most thorough examples we have of Jesus having a one-on-one conversation with someone. In learning the steps of how to do something and remembering those steps, it is often very helpful to have some type of memory aid. Today I am going to give you one that draws from what we read in John 4 that has been invaluable to me as I share with others about Jesus, and my prayer is that it will be of great use to you. So in giving credit where credit is due, this little memory aid is not original to me. It is from an evangelist named

Ray Comfort who heads a California-based ministry called “Living Waters” and he calls how he teaches about evangelism “The Way of the Master.” It is not a Lutheran ministry, but applies a strong Law/Gospel dynamic which many modern evangelistic “methods” are missing. I have learned much from his ministry that I have been able to apply.

So here is what I want you remember for the steps that can guide you through any encounter where you share the Gospel; four letters: RCCR. “R” is for “Relate”, the first “C” is “Create”, the second “C” is “Convict”, and finally the last “R” is “Reveal”. Now obviously in the context of one sermon, I can’t give as in-depth of a teaching as a multi-session Bible Study- but let’s walk through this outline based on our text.

As I said a moment ago, the first “R” is “Relate.” When you first start talking to someone, we often make “small talk”. It often centers around the weather, current events, sports, or the activity that we currently are doing. “If you died tonight, would you be sure that you would go to heaven?”, can be a good question when witnessing but you probably generally don’t want to just walk up to someone and lead with that. Talk to them. Be nice. Form a bond and trust-which can be done very quickly by the way.

Our text sets the scene as Jesus and his disciples have been travelling. Of course, travel was on foot and it gets hot in the Middle East. It is the sixth hour and John is likely using the Jewish reckoning of time here so that means it was noon-they would be tired and ready for a break. They stop in one of the major Samaritan towns, Sychar (Shechem in the OT). The disciples are sent to the main part of town to buy food. Jesus goes to the local well, which happens to be a very ancient and likely the deepest one in Israel at the time-going all the way back to Jacob. Jesus is at the well and the woman shows up. They have something in common, right. They both

want some water. So what does Jesus say to the Samaritan woman first? In verse 7, He asks for a drink. They begin by talking about everyday things, water and even a political/social issue of how the Jews and Samaritans are divided.

Just about all of our conversations begin in the natural realm, especially with people we don't know well. But if we want to witness of Christ to someone, the conversation can't end here. This is where the next step comes in, the first "C" which is "Create". To share the message of salvation in Christ with someone, we must shift the conversation from the natural to the spiritual. This is perhaps the most awkward part. But it needs to happen. Because let me let you in on a little secret, one you probably already know, if you don't deliberately move the conversation in that direction the other person rarely will do so.

In verse 10, Jesus very specifically shifts the conversation by saying to her, *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it was that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* Now they are just not talking about physical water that quenches physical thirst. Jesus has introduced God and a different type of water to the conversation. So when you are talking to someone, look for and create opportunities to shift the conversation. If water is involved like this it could be fairly simple as just as Jesus did, there are plenty of ways to shift that to the spiritual. It may be that you offer them a Gospel tract. It could be that you ask if they have a Christian background. This time of year it could be asking what they are doing for Easter? There are various ways to do this, and if you practice it you will find ways that you are successful at. But this creating the opportunity for speaking of the things of God must take place.

We then read that Jesus and the woman continue to speak. He contrasts physical water and living water further (as He will contrast physical and spiritual blindness in next week's text). The conversation has shifted to include the spiritual, but He still hasn't got to the main point.

This comes with the last two letters. The second "C" is convict. This is opening up the Law of God. For someone to see the need for a Savior, they must know that they are a sinner. They, as all of us have, have violated God's Holy Law and thus stand under condemnation without the forgiveness of Jesus. The Law is that mirror that shows how sinful and wicked we are. God has given each person a conscience and the Holy Spirit works to awaken that conscience and bring conviction of sin.

In verses 16-19 Jesus does this with the woman at the well. He drills down on the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" with the woman. This is a major sin problem in her life. Perhaps it is the reason that she has gone to the well at a time of the day when none of the other women will be there with disapproving glances. Jesus tells her to call her husband, she says she has none, and Jesus then points out that she has actually had 5 husbands and is now living with another man she is not married to. To which she offers that great response, "*Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.*" Jesus has used the Law to show and bring conviction of sin.

Well, this was easy for Jesus to do because He is God and knew everything about this woman already, you may be thinking. Am I supposed to point my finger in someone's face and say, "You are a sinner and are going to hell!" No, that is not what Jesus did either with this woman. We may not know the specific sins that a person has committed, but we do know that they are a sinner because Romans 3:23 tells us, "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" So rather than us doing the accusing-let

the Law do it, ask questions. Do they consider themselves a good person? They probably will say “yes”. Then ask some more questions based on the 10 Commandments to see if that is so. “How many lies have you told? Have you ever stolen anything, even if it is small? Have you always put God first in every instance? When one answers these questions honestly, we see that we have indeed all failed to live up to God’s standard of perfection. When one is convicted of and concerned about their sin, then we get to the part we all have been waiting for.

The last “R” is reveal. This is sharing the Gospel. This is sharing who Jesus is and what He has done to wash away sin. We don’t deserve it. We don’t earn it. But, by grace through faith this forgiveness is available. The woman is now concerned and wants to discuss and sort out the differences between the Samaritans and Jews. We may be witnessing to someone and if they have a different denominational or faith background and they may want to have the same type of conversation. But Jesus here, and we when we are sharing our faith, want to point out that the main issue is not what groups have separations, but that we should not be separated from God. In verse 26 Jesus reveals specifically and directly to her who He is: He is the Messiah, *“I who speak to you am he.”* When we speak to someone about our religious faith, it must proclaim who Jesus is and what He has done. Without that you may be having an interesting conversation, but not a true witnessing encounter that gives the only solution to overcoming sin and death. There is indeed “room at the cross” for them. Witnessing must be about Jesus!

If we had more time, a lot more could be gone into about this. But for today I want you take away the key outline to sharing about Christ with others that we see modeled by Jesus in St. John 4; RCCR: **Relate** by

beginning to speak to someone about everyday things, deliberately **Create** an opportunity to speak about the things of God by shifting the conversation to the spiritual, use the conscience as an ally to **Convict** using the Law, and finally **Reveal** Jesus as true God and true man who is the only One who brings forgiveness, life, and salvation.

As we come to a close we want to bask in that joy that comes when one hears the Word of God and gladly receives it. As the Holy Spirit delivers the Living Water, the woman becomes so excited she just leaves her water jar behind and tells everyone in town about what just happened. She speaks a familiar phrase that those who had met Jesus said, “Come, see”. She no doubt had a bad reputation in town, but that didn’t matter to her anymore. Anyone and everyone who would listen to her heard about Jesus. He had not rejected her, but received her in grace and love. And her fellow Samaritans, also looked down on by others, they invite Jesus to stay with them and He does! We are told that many more believed as Jesus spoke to them. And the closing words of our Gospel Lesson for today are so wonderful, “*We know this is indeed the Savior of the world.*” Not just for Jews. Not just for “respectable people”, but the Savior of the *world*. All that will in repentant faith receive His “living water” join His eternal kingdom. We know this. They learned this. We have the joyous opportunity to share it with others.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.