

John 4:1-30  
September 20,'09

UNBINDING YOUR HEART - #4  
"MOMENTS TO REMEMBER"

SOME OF YOU, UPON SEEING THE TITLE OF THE SERMON TODAY, MAY HAVE THOUGHT OF A SONG THAT'S TOO OLD FOR EVEN ME TO REMEMBER HEARING WHEN IT WAS POPULAR.

*"THE NEW YEAR'S EVE WE DID THE TOWN  
THE DAY WE TORE THE GOAL POSTS DOWN  
WE WILL HAVE THESE MOMENTS TO REMEMBER.  
THE QUIET WALKS, THE NOISY FUN  
THE BALLROOM PRIZE WE ALMOST WON  
WE WILL HAVE THESE MOMENTS TO REMEMBER.  
THOUGH SUMMER TURNS TO WINTER  
AND THE PRESENT DISAPPEARS  
THE LAUGHTER WE WERE GLAD TO SHARE  
WILL ECHO THROUGH THE YEARS.  
WHEN OTHER NIGHTS AND OTHER DAYS  
MAY FIND US GONE OUR SEPARATE WAYS  
WE WILL HAVE THESE MOMENTS TO REMEMBER."*

THOSE ARE THE LYRICS TO "MOMENTS TO REMEMBER," FIRST RECORDED BY THE FOUR LADS IN 1955.

SOME OF YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER, PERHAPS WITH A BIT OF NOSTALGIA, THOSE WORDS.

AGE ISN'T REALLY A FACTOR, THOUGH, WHEN IT COMES TO "MOMENTS TO REMEMBER."  
WE ALL HAVE THEM.

THERE ARE THE BIG COLLECTIVE "MEMORABLE MOMENTS" – THOSE EVENTS THAT WERE EXPERIENCED BY EVERYONE ALIVE WHEN THEY HAPPENED – THE EVENTS THAT ALWAYS PROVOKE THE QUESTION – *"DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE WERE YOU WERE WHEN SUCH-AND-SUCH HAPPENED?"*

THE FACT THAT MOST PEOPLE *DO* REMEMBER WHERE THEY WERE & WHAT THEY WERE DOING PROVES THAT IT WAS, INDEED, A "MEMORABLE MOMENT."

THERE ARE ALSO MEMORABLE MOMENTS THAT WE EXPERIENCE INDIVIDUALLY OR WITH A SMALLER GROUP OF PEOPLE – FAMILY & FRIENDS.

YOU CLEARLY REMEMBER OBVIOUS MOMENTS – THE DAY OF A WEDDING, THE BIRTH OF A CHILD, THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE.

MORE THAN LIKELY, YOU CAN REMEMBER SOME PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THOSE MOMENTS IN VERY VIVID DETAIL.

BUT WHAT OTHER “MEMORABLE MOMENTS” DO WE EXPERIENCE THAT AREN’T ANTICIPATED OR PLANNED?

WHAT ABOUT THOSE MOMENTS THAT ARE IMBEDDED FIRMLY IN YOUR MEMORY THAT MAY HAVE HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT UPON YOUR LIFE THAT JUST EMERGED, SEEMINGLY, OUT OF NOWHERE?

FOR SOME OF YOU, SUCH MOMENTS WILL COME IMMEDIATELY TO MIND.

FOR OTHERS, YOU MAY HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT A WHILE, BUT I’M CERTAIN THEY’RE THERE.

OBVIOUSLY, SOME OF THOSE MOMENTS AREN’T PLEASANT OR POSITIVE.

BUT WHAT I’D LIKE US TO FOCUS ON THIS MORNING ARE THOSE UNEXPECTED MEMORABLE MOMENTS OF LIFE THAT LEAVE US WITH A WARM & HAPPY FEELING – A FEELING THAT LIFE WAS CHANGED FOR THE BETTER IN THAT EXPERIENCE.

THAT’S OBVIOUSLY WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE WOMAN WE’VE JUST READ ABOUT IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.

SHE CAME TO THE WELL AT THE HOTTEST TIME OF DAY, WHEN NO ONE ELSE WOULD HAVE BEEN THERE.

MANY HAVE SPECULATED ABOUT WHY SHE CAME AT SUCH A LONELY TIME.

MAYBE SHE HAD A BAD REPUTATION FOR BEING DIVORCED 5 TIMES.

BUT MAYBE ALL THOSE HUSBANDS HAD DIED.

MAYBE IT WAS GRIEF THAT BROUGHT HER THERE ALONE.

MAYBE IT WAS SHAME.

WE DON’T KNOW WHAT IT WAS, BUT SOMETHING KEPT HER ISOLATED THAT DAY.

SHE WOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED TO HAVE COMPANY AT THE WELL AT THAT HOUR.

BUT JESUS WAS THERE WHEN SHE ARRIVED.

AND HE TALKED TO HER.

IT WASN’T JUST A SIMPLE “HELLO” AS HE PASSED BY.

IF YOU WERE ASKED TO NAME THE PERSON WITH WHOM JESUS HAD THE MOST EXTENDED CONVERSATION RECORDED IN ALL 4 GOSPELS, WHAT WOULD YOUR ANSWER BE?

YOU MIGHT THINK IT WAS ONE OF THE DISCIPLES OR PILATE OR ONE OF HIS OTHER ACCUSERS OR MAYBE NICODEMUS OR THE RICH, YOUNG RULER.

IT WAS, IN FACT, THIS SAMARITAN WOMAN.

THIS IS THE LONGEST RECORDED CONVERSATION JESUS HAD WITH ANYONE IN ALL 4 GOSPELS.

JESUS STARTED OUT JUST MAKING SMALL TALK.

HE SIMPLY ASKED THE WOMAN FOR A DRINK OF WATER.

BUT THAT ONE REQUEST BROKE DOWN BARRIERS THAT HAD EXISTED FOR CENTURIES.

JUST A FEW SIMPLE WORDS BETWEEN A JEWISH MAN & A SAMARITAN WOMAN VIOLATED SOCIAL & RELIGIOUS RULES THAT HAD BEEN FOLLOWED FOR GENERATIONS – RULES ABOUT INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN – RULES ABOUT INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS.

BUT ONCE THE BARRIERS WERE DOWN, THE FLOODWATERS OF CONVERSATION FLOWED.

JESUS & THE WOMAN TALKED ABOUT SPIRITUAL THIRST.

THEY TALKED ABOUT HER LIFE & HER PAST.

THEY EVEN TALKED – HEAVEN FORBID! – POLITICS & RELIGION!

BY THE TIME THE CONVERSATION HAD ENDED, JESUS HAD REVEALED THAT HE WAS THE MESSIAH.

THE WOMAN WAS SO MOVED BY THE CONVERSATION THAT SHE WENT RUNNING TO THE VILLAGE.

THIS WAS A MEMORABLE MOMENT – AN UNEXPECTED, UNANTICIPATED MEMORABLE MOMENT THAT WOULD CHANGE HER LIFE FOREVER.

THIS WOMAN WHO HAD ISOLATED HERSELF FROM OTHERS NOW WENT IN SEARCH OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM TO SHARE WHAT SHE HAD EXPERIENCED.

JOHN TELLS US AN AMAZING THING THAT HAPPENED AS SHE DEPARTED.

VERSE 28 READS, *“THEN THE WOMAN LEFT HER WATER JAR & WENT BACK TO THE CITY.”*

SHE LEFT HER WATER JAR AT THE WELL!

THAT WAS THE REASON SHE HAD GONE THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE & YET SHE LEFT IT BEHIND.

SUDDENLY THE WELLWATER ON WHICH SHE HAD FOCUSED HER ATTENTION BECAME COMPLETELY INSIGNIFICANT TO HER BECAUSE SHE HAD FOUND, IN JESUS, THE LIVING WATER THAT WOULD SOOTHE HER SOUL.

THIS IS A MAGNIFICENT STORY WITH A PROFOUND MESSAGE.

LET ME ASK – WITH WHOM DO YOU MOST IDENTIFY IN THIS STORY?

I SUPPOSE, AS WE LOOK AT THE OPTIONS, WE COULD INCLUDE THE DISCIPLES WHO HAD GONE LOOKING FOR FOOD & THEN RETURNED TO THE WELL TO SEE THIS ENCOUNTER.

THOUGH IT’S A STRETCH, I SUPPOSE WE MIGHT ALSO SUGGEST THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE WOMAN SHARES HER EXPERIENCE.

BUT BASICALLY, WE’VE GOT TWO OPTIONS HERE – YOU CAN IDENTIFY WITH THE WOMAN OR YOU CAN IDENTIFY WITH JESUS.

PERHAPS IT CAN BE MOST HELPFUL TO CONSIDER OURSELVES IN BOTH ROLES – DEPENDING ON THE TIME & THE PARTICULAR SITUATION.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN BY IDENTIFYING WITH THE WOMAN?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE HER?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT ALONE & ISOLATED IN LIFE?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT AS THOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES THRUST UPON YOU OR YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR HAVE MADE YOU AN OUTCAST?

IT'S A PAINFUL & LONELY FEELING, ISN'T IT?

YOU FEEL AS THOUGH IT'S ALL YOU CAN DO TO CARRY A BUCKET OF BURDENS AROUND & MAKE IT FROM DAY TO DAY.

IT WAS AT JUST SUCH A TIME THAT THIS WOMAN MET JESUS.

HE MET HER & ACCEPTED HER & CHANGED HER LIFE.

SHE TOSSED HER BUCKET ASIDE & WENT RUSHING BACK INTO THE VILLAGE BECAUSE SOMETHING FAR MORE IMPORTANT HAD ENTERED HER LIFE.

IT WAS A MEMORABLE MOMENT FOR HER.

MAYBE THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED TO DO.

LEAVE THE BURDENS BEHIND & RUSH HEADLONG BACK INTO THE WORLD & BACK INTO LIFE.

BUT HOW DO YOU SHARE WITH OTHERS WHAT THE EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD WITH JESUS HAS MEANT TO YOU?

AGAIN, LEARN A LESSON FROM THIS SAMARITAN WOMAN.

SHE WASN'T A THEOLOGIAN.

SHE WAS NO LEARNED STUDENT OF SCRIPTURE.

LOOK AT WHAT SHE SAID TO THE PEOPLE BACK HOME:

*"COME & SEE A MAN WHO TOLD ME EVERYTHING I HAVE EVER DONE! HE CANNOT BE THE MESSIAH, CAN HE?"*

AS THE GREAT PREACHER FRED CRADDOCK SAYS, " 'A MAN WHO TOLD ME ALL THAT I EVER DID' IS NOT EXACTLY A RECITATION OF THE APOSTLES' CREED. SHE'S NOT EVEN A CONVINCED WITNESS - 'HE CANNOT BE THE MESSIAH, CAN HE?'"

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS SAMARITAN WOMAN IS THAT AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CAN ENABLE US TO LEAVE THE BUCKETS OF OUR BURDENS BEHIND & SIMPLY TELL OUR OWN STORY AS SIMPLY & AS PASSIONATELY AS WE CAN.

WE DON'T HAVE TO HAVE THE RIGHT WORDS OR THE RIGHT THEOLOGY OR EVEN A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF WHO JESUS IS.

HOW THAT STORY IMPACTS OTHERS IS NOT IN OUR POWER.

THAT'S THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THE OTHER MAIN CHARACTER IN THIS STORY WITH WHOM WE CAN RELATE IS JESUS.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM HIM IN THIS ENCOUNTER?

OBVIOUSLY WE CAN'T REALLY PUT OURSELVES IN THE ROLE OF JESUS.

WHEN SOMEBODY MEETS US THEY AREN'T MEETING THE MESSIAH.

AS WE CONSIDER SO MANY OF THE ENCOUNTERS JESUS HAD, WE'RE LEFT FEELING INADEQUATE.

YOU LOOK AT THE EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO MET JESUS & YOU SAY, *"I CAN'T DO ANY OF THOSE THINGS. I CAN'T TELL A CRIPPLED MAN TO STAND UP & WALK. I CAN'T TOUCH SOMEONE'S EYES AND MAKE THEM SEE. I CAN'T TURN TWO FISH & FIVE LOAVES OF BREAD INTO A FEAST FOR THOUSANDS. I CAN'T STAND OUTSIDE THE TOMB OF A DEAD MAN & CALL HIM BACK TO LIFE."*

THIS IS TRUE.

BUT WHAT IS IT THAT JESUS DOES WITH THIS WOMAN?

HE DIDN'T HEAL HER OF A DISEASE – OTHER THAN, PERHAPS, THE DISEASE OF LONELINESS.

HE DIDN'T RESTORE HER SIGHT – OTHER THAN TO BE ABLE TO SEE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE TRUTH OF GOD'S GRACE & MERCY.

HE DIDN'T RAISE HER FROM THE DEAD – OTHER THAN THE DEATH SHE ENDURED AS ONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED EXCLUSION & OSTRACISM FROM HER NEIGHBORS.

WHAT JESUS DID IN THIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN IS TALK TO HER.

HE SIMPLY TALKED TO HER.

HE LISTENED TO HER.

FOR HOWEVER LONG THIS CONVERSATION LASTED, HE FOCUSED HIS ENTIRE ATTENTION ON HER & ONLY ON HER.

ST. AUGUSTINE ONCE SAID THAT JESUS LOVED EVERYBODY HE EVER MET AS IF THAT ONE PERSON WERE THE ONLY PERSON IN ALL THE WORLD.

HE LOVED ALL AS HE LOVED EACH.

EVERY PERSON WHO LOOKED INTO THE EYES OF JESUS FOUND AN AFFECTION LOOKING BACK AT THEM WHICH SAID, IN POWERFUL WAYS, *"WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU MAKES A DIFFERENCE TO ME."*

YOU KNOW PEOPLE LIKE THAT, DON'T YOU?

YOU KNOW PEOPLE WHO MAKE YOU FEEL AS IF YOU REALLY MATTER TO THEM – AS IF WHATEVER IS ON YOUR MIND, WHATEVER IS TROUBLING YOU IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD TO THAT PERSON.

WOULDN'T YOU LOVE TO BE THE KIND OF PERSON WHO WAS KNOWN LIKE THAT?

IT ISN'T HARD.

IT DOESN'T TAKE MIRACULOUS HEALING POWERS.

IT DOESN'T TAKE DEEP INTELLECTUAL UNDERSTANDING & KNOWLEDGE.

IT TAKES NOTHING MORE THAN TIME – TIME & THE HEART OF CHRIST LIVING INSIDE OF YOU.

THAT'S WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM JESUS IN THIS ENCOUNTER.

THERE'S ONE MORE THING JESUS TEACHES US HERE.

IF YOU HAVE FOLLOWED ALONG WITH THIS PASSAGE, LOOK AT THE VERSE WHERE JESUS TELLS THE WOMAN TO REPENT & CHANGE HER BEHAVIOR.

HAVE YOU FOUND IT?

IF YOU HAVE, YOU'RE READING A DIFFERENT BIBLE THAN I AM, BECAUSE IT'S NOT THERE.  
HERE IN THE LONGEST CONVERSATION JESUS EVER HAD WITH ONE PERSON, NOWHERE DOES HE  
CALL THIS WOMAN TO REPENT & CHANGE.

HE SIMPLY ACCEPTS HER.

HE ACCEPTS HER EXACTLY AS SHE IS.

HE ENABLES HER TO KNOW THAT GOD LOVES HER & ACCEPTS HER IN THE MIDST OF WHATEVER  
DIFFICULTIES SHE'S EXPERIENCING.

IN A CHRONICLE OF HIS EARLY LIFE, QUAKER PASTOR & AUTHOR, PHILLIP GULLEY TELLS OF A  
YOUNG TEEN-AGE GIRL WHO WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SOUL OF ONE OF PHILLIP'S FRIENDS.

HE SAYS, "*DOREENA ATTENDED A CERTAIN KIND OF CHURCH IN OUR TOWN & DEVOTED MUCH OF  
HER TIME TO GETTING SCOTTY BLAKE RIGHT WITH THE LORD. INITIALLY, HE RESISTED, WHICH  
HEIGHTENED HER DETERMINATION.*

*SHE HAD HIS NAME PLACED IN HER CHURCH'S NEWSLETTER, IN THE 'NEEDS SAVING' COLUMN."*

I'M NOT SAYING THERE'S ANYTHING FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG WITH THAT BUT THAT'S NOT  
THE WAY WE DO THINGS.

FRANKLY, I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE WAY JESUS DID THINGS EITHER.

IF WE RELATE TO JESUS IN THIS PASSAGE, THE WAY TO DO SO IS TO BE OPEN, LOVING, CARING,  
ACCEPTING & SENSITIVE TO OTHERS – REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY ARE IN LIFE.

THIS ENCOUNTER WAS A MEMORABLE MOMENT FOR THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL.

HOW OFTEN ARE WE PRESENTED – EVERY SINGLE DAY – WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A  
MEMORABLE MOMENT FOR ANOTHER PERSON?

I ASSURE YOU – THOSE MOMENTS PRESENT THEMSELVES FAR MORE OFTEN THAN WE REALIZE.

IF YOU ARE IN TUNE WITH THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST LIVING INSIDE OF YOU, YOU'LL BE OPEN TO  
COUNTLESS OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE SOMEONE IN NEED WITH A MEMORABLE MOMENT THAT WILL  
LAST A LIFETIME.

YOU NEEDN'T POSSESS MIRACULOUS POWERS OR DEEP INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES.

YOU NEED ONLY LISTEN TO SOMEONE AS IF THEY WERE THE ONLY PERSON ON EARTH. AMEN.

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