

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Love That Shows Up
John 4**

We spent the autumn together talking about those things that nobody can take away. What do you have when everything else is gone? The apostle Paul says that in the end only three things remain, right? Faith, faith that helps us to move through life with meaning; and hope, when everything goes wrong in our lives, will we have hope that will help us endure? Not just get through it but believe that life has meaning? And then, here in Advent, faith and hope really depend on love, love that shows up, not just a Hallmark card from above, love that shows up in front of us in unexpected ways. We started that last week in the Gospel of John talking about how love shows up. What I'd like to do today is talk about John's story about Jesus, about how love shows up unexpectedly. It is in the fourth chapter of John's story. Jesus is at a little bit of a crossroads. It says that Jesus heard of the Pharisees increased attention. That is a bad thing.

³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there....

I put up a map just to show what we are talking about. (*Slide shown.*) Jesus is down in that pinkish area there. That is called Judea, the southern part of Israel where Jerusalem is. He has been down there. The northern two-thirds of Israel back then was split up. The blue patch is called Samaria and the yellow patch at the top is called Galilee. You see when Israel was conquered about 500 years before Jesus, they stripped the top two-thirds of the country away and the conquerors resettled it with their armies and their nobles and made it a colony. They intermarried with the Jews who lived there, especially in that little part, that sort of blue part. That is called Samaria. Samaritans were seen by the Jews as traitors, traitors to God, half-breeds. It says Jesus had to go through Samaria to get back up to His home district of Galilee. Tired from the journey, Jesus sat down by the well while the disciples went into town to get some food.

It was about noon, and a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Now it is important what time it is because in the Middle East, noon is like midnight for us, not much stirring. It is so hot, nobody goes out at noon. The only people who would go out are the people who are sort of stuck, going some place else, like Jesus, and those who want to be alone. It is like midnight shopping for us. I'm not talking about Black Friday, you know, when it is cool to be crazy and stupid and stay up. Usually shopping at midnight--you've done it--is when you realize you need medicine or something for the morrow, and it is 12:00 or 1:00 a.m. You go to one of these all-night pharmacies or stores and you walk up and down the aisles. The people you bump into are not the people you see during the day, are they? They are different. Some of them disfigured. Some

of them obviously lower-class. Some of them morbidly obese. It is a different world at night, not a comfortable world all the time. What was interesting to me this last week--some of you may have heard it on one of the news shows--was that Walmart has started to staff its stores with extra clerks at midnight on the first day of the month. The reason is that food stamp money is now deposited electronically onto the cards between 8:00 p.m. and midnight but can't be used until after midnight on the first day of the month. So many of the poorest of the poor among us go to Walmart at midnight so they won't have to bump into other people to get food for morning.

That is the Samaritan woman. Jesus spoke to this woman. He said, "Will you give me a drink?" She said, "You are a Jew and I am woman. I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?" Remember they don't like each other. But Jesus and this woman have a conversation, and as you heard last week, this is the longest conversation Jesus has with anybody in the Bible. They talk about getting water out of the well, and then they talk about living water and the different ways that the Samaritans and the Jews see God, religion, and in the process of this conversation, Jesus does a bunch of things, a couple that you might not get.

The first thing is that He is talking at all. Good people of His day would not talk to a Samaritan. They are the enemy, foreigners, and you wouldn't talk to a low-class person because they are punished by being poor. As a man of good reputation, you certainly wouldn't talk to a woman who probably is some kind of prostitute, and yet Jesus has this deep discussion with her about God, about her real life and His real life. He honors her by acting as if she has a brain. He honors her by drawing her in.

The second thing about this conversation is that He doesn't let it stay at the surface. We all wear masks all the time. We all do. We come in here and we look happy and good, like our life is together. We know the truth but none of us is going to tell it, right? Jesus jumps right behind the mask that we all wear and talks about the pain of not one failed marriage, but of five failed marriages. Now she is living with somebody else. And, instead of condemning her like everybody else does, He offers her hope, water that will never leave her soul. He treats her like she has value. She says, "I know that at the end, the Messiah will come and He will explain everything." And Jesus says, "I am sitting here right in front of you, for you." And the woman left her jar of water and went into town and said to everybody, "C'mon, c'mon. See a man who told me everything about myself. Could He be the one? Could it be Him?"

Does the story sound any different from last week? How many of you were here last week? I hope you heard a sermon quite a bit like this. Lee Hanssen, one of our student ministers, talked from John 4, and I've got to tell you, I listened to it Wednesday and he killed it! It was great! Not just because he has a gift of communicating but because from my perspective, he took off the mask a little and opened his heart and talked about how he was thirsty, how we are all thirsty. Remember how he talked about how hard it is to wait? How we hate waiting, and he hated it? He talked about how God's water was found, not on a retreat, not in a church, but in the middle of the day, in the heat of the day, at work, for this woman. He talked about how living water changed that woman and changed him, and he said, "So she leaves the well changed and goes out and changes everybody around." He did a great job!

Lee said this is the longest conversation Jesus ever had, though I think there are a lot of people Jesus is talking to. He said that Jesus was talking to the woman and then she talked to the townspeople, right? But I think Jesus was also talking to the disciples. They are bit players in

this little thing. They come up toward the end, but what have the disciples learned from Jesus and the woman at the well? What are we supposed to learn because we are just like them? We are clueless. We are trying to follow Jesus, and we live in a very divided world just like Jesus did. This is the best story in the whole Gospel of John to show what happens when love shows up among people that you are not comfortable with, even among the enemy. And it is not about religion, because when different religions show up at the same place, they clash. Airplanes fly into towers. People drop bombs on innocent villages. We build walls, literal walls, to divide us from *the other*. That is religion, but when Jesus shows up, lives change.

Jesus shows up, and He won't just stay in this little ghetto. He won't stay where He is supposed to. He won't stay with His own kind. He keeps saying, "I have to go to these other people." He spends so much time with the wrong kind of people, everybody gets mad at Him. In the same way, Jesus sees the people that nobody else sees, the homeless that you might fish for a dollar for. Jesus doesn't just say, "Hey! See ya, buddy!" He says, "Tell me a little about your story." Jesus wants to teach the disciples to look past the masks to everybody's thirsts underneath and if you recognize Him, He says, "Drink real life." So the key is, will Jesus' followers learn to do the same thing? Now early signs weren't good, right? It says the disciples came up and saw Jesus with the woman and said, "Whoa. What is going on here?" but they were afraid to ask Him and so they said, "Hey, Jesus, let's get something to eat." And when He says He's not hungry, they wonder who cut in front in the food line. They are not getting the message, but will we? Will you walk out of here better able to see the loss you left behind? We will we offer water or just religious laws?

I'd like to introduce you to somebody who is trying to do that as well as he can. He comes from a part of the world that is filled with these divisions. Let me put another map up on the screen. (*Slide shown*). This is modern-day Middle East. The brown there is Israel. You see the Gaza Strip and the West Bank semi-dividing it, and then just to the right of it looks like a big country but it is not a huge country. It is Jordan. Our friend lives in Amman, Jordan about 45 miles away from Jerusalem. It could be on the other side of the world. He has been a presence there, and I don't want to say that he is bringing Jesus to the Middle East because Jesus came from the Middle East. Jesus was in the Middle East longer than Jesus has been in Edina, but sometimes in the religions, Jesus gets lost in the shuffle. He and some friends are trying to do something about that. I'd like to introduce you to him, but first I'd like you to see a two-minute video of the story of what they are trying to accomplish. (*Video shown.*)

Don't you love the creativity? Doesn't it make you feel old? The second time, not the first time, but the second time I'm watching this video, I recognize the tattoos. It is one of our young women, Ashley Barlow, who works at The Table. She is going to interview our speaker tonight. She went to the Middle East and saw the work of Questscope, and as I said at the first service, "She has drunk the Kool-Aid." She has not just become a believer, she has become engaged. The person who started this has that effect. His name is Curt Rhodes. Curt spent over 30 years working with marginalized people and young people all across the Middle East. In 1988 he and a group at Questscope established a goal of putting the last first, working with local communities, women, young people, prisoners, mentoring, empowering, discovering. At the heart of Questscope is a commitment to individual transformation, a community that collaborates in ways that change the society. Questscope wants to incarnate the presence of Jesus in the Middle East, not bringing Jesus there but showing what Jesus might be doing. In recognition of his work with Questscope in Jordan and around the Middle East, Dr. Rhodes was

recently awarded Social Entrepreneur of the Year for the Middle East and North Africa by the Schwab Foundation. We are thrilled to have him with us for a couple of minutes. Curt.

I told Curt I wanted him to say everything that he could in eight minutes in terms of the Middle East. Piece of cake. Three questions. I sent him the text of what we were going to talk about, Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, and I said, "Could I just ask you three questions about what Jesus is teaching in this story and through Questscope?" I said, "In this story Jesus sees the people that nobody else sees. Can you give me an example of how Questscope wants to do that in the Middle East?"

Curt Rhodes: One of my homes is Damascus, Syria. We probably know a lot more about Syria this month than we wished we did. And my favorite coffee shop is not Starbucks but Abdullah's. It looks like Starbucks. It's kind of green. It's got nice chairs and tables, and really good Arabic coffee. In this city of Damascus which is 4 million people, we are responsible for the juvenile correction center for young males. That in itself is a miracle. We have on our team who works there, people from Muslim backgrounds and people from Christian backgrounds because we want to have Muslims and Christians mixing it up with young people who have gotten in trouble.

One of these young men--there are 4,000 young people who go through this center every year and that is a lot of young guys--one of these young men did something that got him in prison for three or four years, juvenile custody. During this time his father never contacted him. His family was pretty much shamed by one of their members going to prison. But we had this very tenacious young woman working as a volunteer who figured out that this young man hadn't seen his dad for that period of time, and she found his family. She talked to his father, and she convinced him to come to see his son. He came in the door, the hall was quite long, and when the boy saw his father, he ran to him and said, "I thought you had forgotten me." His father said, "I thought I had, too." So to be able to bring people from Muslim backgrounds, people from Christian backgrounds, people who have gotten in trouble together with people who have resources to help, that is a real, great privilege.

John Crosby: When I think of the Middle East, I too often think of riots and bombs and angry Muslims and angry Jews and angry Christians. All that dominates, but Jesus somehow seems to reach past that with this Ammanian woman. I guess I want to ask, how does Questscope try to reach past all that?

Curt Rhodes: Somebody asked me once a number of years ago, "What would Jesus do in the Middle East if He dropped by this afternoon?" And my first response was, "He would listen to everybody, and he would make it possible for everybody to be heard." One of the things that we have as our common practice point is a thing called the round table, because here in the Middle East, I think it is a matter of posturing and positioning and making sure that I am going to have the upper hand, not unlike King Arthur and his knights. That is why he had to create a round table, so nobody could tell who was the best knight. Remember that? That is in our history. So the round table means that you can talk and I can listen because I don't have to agree with you, but I can talk and you can listen because you don't have to agree with me. For the first time we actually heard each other. We actually made that human-to-human bridge because in the Middle East,

nobody is all right, nobody is perfect, nobody has got all the answers, and certainly the guy in the white hat riding in on the white horse is never going to save everybody. So to be able to have this environment, this social and emotional talk space where young people especially can listen and be heard is really a miracle.

John Crosby: They all need that over there, the ability to talk with people who are different. We do that just fine here. We are Presbyterians, I am sorry, but thank you for the reminder. We are trying to have those kinds of conversations, that kind of spirit that Jesus had with this woman at the well, so different, talking to and with instead of yelling at and being superior, and yet we live in a society with huge wedges. Jesus doesn't just ask the woman for water. He offers her living water, eternal water. What is the Jesus difference? What difference does Jesus make from the Red Cross in Amman? How does Questscope deal with that?

Curt Rhodes: We have 65 staffers and 4,000 volunteers and 6,000 young people a year are going through the correction system. You will expect from time to time a little bit of chaos, right? A little bit of disagreement. Three or four years ago we had some *big* disagreements. One of my key staffers who is a young Sunni Muslim came to me and said, "I need to talk to you." When your staff comes at you with that kind of voice, you generally sit down, right? So I said, "Okay, let's talk. What are you going to talk about?" He said, "I want to talk about Jesus." Well, that was my line, right? Okay. So he sits down at the table, and he said, "I need to tell you something that you probably know." He said, "As Muslims we have a prophet, the prophet Muhammed, and as Jews, they have a prophet, the prophet Moses, and you guys who are Christian, you have a prophet whose name is Jesus." He said, "Let's put the first two prophets on the side, and let's talk about Jesus."

He said, "We are going to go through such struggle in the next two or three years. All the staff are filled with such bad feelings for each other. Employees are going to do violence to each other emotionally unless you will absorb it." He said me, "You do understand this about Jesus, right?" He is asking me this. I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, Jesus took onto Himself the violence. He stopped the violence and because He took it, and He was broken. He brought peace to us." He said, "Will you do that for us?" I said, "I'll give it a try, but I don't want to do it alone." I said, "You know what happened to Jesus," and I held my arms up, and he goes, "Yeah." And that is all he said. So I didn't know if I was alone or if he was with me at that point.

We went through a very difficult patch, and sure enough, that presence of the incarnation, of absorbing violence and not returning evil for evil, really saved us as an organization and made us better equipped, not only to practice what we preach to each other but to serve the young people who are also at the bottom of the chain of violence. It was just phenomenal to have a staff person ask me, do I get that about Jesus, and usually I do, you know.

John Crosby: So I guess part of the reason I wanted Curt to come was so that you would see that living water is being poured out in the Middle East even when a lot of times it feels like it is being poured on the sand. First, it is being poured onto the people who are trying to get it themselves, just like us. We are being called to go to the woman at the well, follow Jesus there,

see the least, the lost, the left behind, the talked at, and offering the living water, the grace, the forgiveness, the light that we are receiving ourselves. I was going to ask us to thank Curt by applauding, but I think it would actually be better, that we would encourage him even more, by praying with him.

Lord Jesus, Rabbi Jesus, King Jesus, I thank You for our brother and all the women and men who stand behind Him for trying to bring Your truth. We say it so glibly *Thy Kingdom come* but we are trying to bring Your kingdom. I pray that in those times when they lose their way, You will give them faith in Your goodness that shows them the way. I pray when they run out of strength and they fall down, You will give them hope that allows them to endure and get up. I pray that You will give them love, love that shows up and offers the water of life. We ask this in the Name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. And all God's children said,

All: Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.