



Presbyterian AIDS Network
A Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare
Association (PHEWA)

Encounter: No Ordinary Meeting

A World AIDS Day Sermon

Note : Illustrations in this sermon may be adapted. Scripture is in red. Emphasis and illustrations are in blue and purple.

Introduction: Encounter, No Ordinary Meeting

Today, we remember World AIDS Day and stand together with the 1.2 million brothers and sisters here in the US who have felt stigma and discrimination because of a virus. Through scripture, we intentionally step into an encounter that Jesus had with a woman that was no ordinary meeting. As we look into this encounter, I pray that God would examine our hearts and make aware any stigma and discrimination we may have. I also pray that if we are the hurting woman in this story, we would encounter an experience with Jesus like no other.

Let's jump in.

Encounter means:

- A chance meeting
- A meeting of conflict

It is more than a casual run in at Wholefoods

- Perhaps it started that way but it became something more.
- It became a significant event... an encounter.
- A moment in time

Today we are exploring ordinary women who had an "encounter" with Jesus.

- This encounter speaks directly into some of the ways we may question who Jesus is.

This week we will talk about a Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at a community well.

First let me give a quick background -it sets the stage

In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel

- They took most people into captivity.
- They brought in Gentile (non Jewish) outsiders to resettle the land. (2 Kin. 17:24)
- These outsiders brought pagan idols.
- The remaining Jews began to worship these idols alongside the God of Israel (2 Kin. 17:29-41).
- This caused tensions with Jews who were not in Israel
- Intermarriages also took place (Ezra 9:1-10:44; Neh. 13:23-28).

Later... a remnant of 43,000 Jews were permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

- The people who now inhabited the former northern kingdom—the Samaritans—vigorously opposed the reinstatement and tried to undermine the attempt to reestablish the nation.
- For their part, the full-blooded, monotheistic Jews detested the mixed marriages and worship of their northern cousins.
- So walls of bitterness were erected on both sides and did nothing but harden for the next 550 years.

So much hatred existed between these two cultures.

- When Jews would travel north they would go around Samaria.
- The Jews wanted nothing to do with Samaria.
- Extreme racism and hatred existed.

This story is about Jesus (a Jew) having a conversation with a Samaritan woman.

- A woman with a past
- A woman with some type of reputation.
- As we heard the reading, she was married 5 times.
- That's unusual in this culture.
- It was extraordinarily unusual in her culture.
- Also, she was now living with a guy who was not her husband.

- She had a public past.
- We don't know her story.
- Maybe her husbands left her for other women.
- She could have had 5 husbands that died.
- Even so - this would have been considered a curse.
- Maybe she was barren. Maybe her heart was broken and she desperately wanted children.
- In this culture you were viewed as worthless if you could not bear a child.

We don't know if her situation was from her own doing or from other.

What we do know is... SHE WAS THIRSTY

- Life had left her thirsty.
- Not for water... but for something more.

John gives us great detail in the story

John 4

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, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. 7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water...

(VS 6) She came to the well at noon.

- No one ever goes to the well at noon.
- For the same reason you don't cut your grass at noon.
- IT'S HOT!
- Normally women would come to the well in the morning or evening when it was not hot.
- They would often come in groups for protection or to socialize.
- She came at noon... by herself

This woman has learned how to survive.

- She is not all that different than us.
- She is skillfully maneuvering to avoid any interaction.
- If she knew she was going to have an encounter with Jesus... she may have rescheduled.
- She has learned to survive in a world that has caused her pain.
- The only reason she was at the well that day was she needed water.
- Little did she know... she was about to have an ENCOUNTER with the savior of the world.
- All she knew, was she was thirsty.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, **Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"** 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

Can I just ask ... How many guys does it take to get lunch?

- Jesus was setting the stage

"Will you give me a drink?" Seems like an ordinary dialogue.

- It wasn't
- If this was an Old Western film:
- When Jesus said "give me a drink"
- The room would have gotten quiet
- The soundtrack would have struck a still chord
- There would be a silent tension
- The prejudice is off the charts.
- It's cultural prejudice
- It's religious prejudice
- It's ethnic prejudice
- It's gender prejudice
- Jesus was a Jew - she was a Samaritan women
- This DID NOT HAPPEN - notice her response

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, **"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"** (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

She's Thinking - Say what?

- A Jewish man, is asking for a drink from me.
- To touch what I have touched.
- To drink from the cup I drank from.
- She may be wondering "Is he instigating?"
- He's crossed the line - when someone crosses the line...

Jesus' Motive -In His request, Jesus was making a statement.

- I view you as one who is worthy to drink after
- I view you as someone I am not afraid to touch
- I have gone out of my way to have an encounter with you.

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Let's remember she has been married 5 times.

- It is very likely that the only thing she is counting on from a man is her basic needs - food and shelter.

Jesus is offering her something better than what she came to get for herself.

- This well was dug by Jacob and has supplied the community's physical needs for hundreds of years.
- Are you saying you have something better than this?

This woman knows Jesus is offering something great... she is not quite sure what it is yet.

ILLUSTRATION - Sometimes when I lose my cellphone, I will have my wife call it.

- I'm downstairs and hear it upstairs, so I move closer.
- Then in the bedroom, move closer.

- While in the bedroom I can hear it, I know I am close but I can't quite pinpoint where it is coming from, I start moving things.
- There it is... under a pile of unfolded clothes.

I feel like this is the picture of what is happening in this dialogue.

- She hears something, moves closer...
- This is often the way our journey looks.
- Often times an encounter begins by hearing something and moving closer.

Then Jesus starts filling in the lines.

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Up until this point, she has strategized ways of getting around the hurt that life has brought her.

- She is at the well at noon...
- To avoid people
- To avoid shame
- She is on her own treatment plan.
- A plan that helps her avoid future pain but does nothing about the shame of her past.
- She's medicating and He offers the cure.

I can relate to this woman.

- Maybe not the 5 husbands and boyfriends.
- Maybe not the potential barrenness but I can relate.
- I relate to her shame.
- That black mark in our past that we don't want anyone to know about.
- The abuse you suffered.
- Crazy college years.
- Maybe it was something you did
- Maybe it was something that was done to you.

Jesus unveiled more than a treatment... a cure.

- Jesus is telling her... and us
- "I have something that will quench the thirst in you"
- Your plans haven't worked
- Through a relationship with me... I can quench that thirst once and for all.

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

I am sure she has heard every sales pitch

- She has no doubt heard many promises.
- We don't know if she is excited or if she is agreeing just so she can get to the end of the pitch.
- Just 130 payments of \$19.99

Then Jesus changes the tone.

- Up until this point, this has been an unusual meeting.
- This is the moment where the unusual meeting turns into a full blown encounter.

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

Awkward!

- Jesus...how insensitive of you...Do you not know that she has been suffering?
- Illustration: It's like that moment I go see my Physician and he starts poking around, and hits a spot that makes me want to kick him across the room...
- That's not supposed to hurt.

So she does exactly what we do... she has framed up a neat response.

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Socially, this is where you get the clue... Don't ask any more questions.

- But you're not talking to the neighbor who just moved in.
- You're talking to Jesus.

17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

Jesus did to her what he would like to do to each of us this morning.

- He suddenly... painfully... insensitively put her in touch with her thirst.
- Life has let you thirsty.
- Your attempts to quench your thirst have left you empty.

I love the emotional conflict.

- She just got called out by Jesus.
- Normally this would evoke a defensive response.
- But in this moment she has to realize Jesus knew her past and still was willing to:
 - Sit with her.
 - Talk with her
 - Drink from her cup

Then

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet."

I can see you are different.

Then she goes on a bit of a rant.

- She changes the subject.
- Jews worship here - we worship there...
- What I hear her saying is...
- I am confused.
- I don't really want to talk about this.
- Give me time and I will excuse every one of my bad decisions.

- I am religiously aware but don't know where to start.
- We all experience shame . . . some of it is internal anguish some of it is external avoidance.

Jesus kind of goes along with it - whew!

I would sum up Jesus' response as:

- You can start here... right now

Then she deflects a little... seems like she has been to this place before.

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

((PAUSE))

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

28 Then, leaving her water jar,

I love that the writer (John) includes this detail.

- She leaves behind her short term remedy to her thirst.

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

"He told me everything I ever did"???

- This was not likely a secret.
- Her past was public.

There is something about the way she said this.

- With transparency.

- No more hiding
- No more shame
- In the beginning of this story she was arranging her day to avoid a sliver of interaction.
- Now she is going into town, into public.
- What is different?
- She had an encounter with Jesus.
- She came to the well full of shame and regret.
- She left the well with hope.
- In this moment she has experienced a transformation.
- Even still, she is not sure she fully gets it.

30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

The beauty of this whole story is God took what could have destroyed her and redeemed it.

- Now others are able to have an encounter with Jesus because of her story.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to point you back to the beginning of this story.

John 4 4 Now he had to go through Samaria.

He did not HAVE to go through Samaria.

- Everyone knew - you just go around Samaria.
- Jesus knew
- From the woman's perspective, this was a chance meeting.
- From Jesus' perspective this was a planned encounter.
- In this story we get a picture of how God views the thirsty.
- If we are honest with ourselves, many of us are thirsty.
- Thirsty because of our own decisions.
- Thirsty because of other's decisions.
- There is something missing, and I have tried other things to quench that thirst.
- Today, is your opportunity to encounter Jesus or to share in the incarnational work of Jesus by actively seeking to encounter

brothers and sisters who are vulnerable or who society or even church has pushed aside.

The remarkable part of the story is... while she was taking her walk of shame through the village that day, Jesus was making plans to have an encounter at a well.

Today, as we honor and remember World AIDS Day, we invite you to be a part of restoring our HIV+ brothers and sisters back into community. We invite you to engage with the most vulnerable. We invite you to enter Samaria instead of going around the city. And if you are sitting here this morning, having an encounter with Jesus for the first time, Jesus is able to remove any guilt or shame. He does not see you and attach stigma. He sees you and sets you free so that you may proclaim His work in your life.

Written by: Raymond Almstadt, Central Presbyterian Church:
ray@centralpc.org

Adapted and contextualized by: Erin Donovan, HopeSprings:
edonovan@hopesprings.org

Bibliography

Historical Reference: The Word in Life Study Bible, New Testament Edition, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; 1993), pp. 340-341

