



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church  
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

## ***“Can I have a Word with you?”*** **Sermon on John 4:5-15**

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March 8, 2026  
Third Sunday of Lent

You're about to eavesdrop on a long-ago conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan Woman. It's a strange conversation. The words of Jesus are flying at about 50,000 feet, and the woman's words are firmly grounded on earth. She doesn't understand where Jesus is coming from.

It reminds me of the family riding home from Thanksgiving dinner, when the father had to field a question from his 6-year-old daughter, “Daddy, why do Uncle Ed and Aunt Evelyn talk to their plates before eating?” The six-year-old had a very earthly question, and daddy, who was solidly earthbound, had to give an answer from above. “Honey, they were saying grace. They were talking to God.” “Why don't we do that?”

How do you explain the above from below?

We can live life solely on the horizontal plane. “I'm going to make so much money.” Horizontal plane. “I have about 20 things on my bucket list.” Horizontal plane. “I'm going to go to the best preschool, the best grade school, the best high school, the best college, the best grad school. I'll have all the education I'll need in life.” Firmly grounded on the horizontal plane. The gospel of John has Jesus piercing the earth from above. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. God sent his son, not to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.”

The Gospel of John says, “If you're living life solely on the horizontal plane, God wants a Word with you!”

### ***John 4:5-29***

So, he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 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 have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 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, for the Father seeks such as these 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" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

The woman left her water jar at the well. Empty!

But she runs on Good News. She has all she can carry... and it spills out to her city! "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!"

So unlike her. Her life has taken a turn. Her day-to-day was an empty jar walking to the well, filling the jar, walking back home, empty jar, fill the jar, empty jar, fill the jar. That's a lot of time spent in your own thoughts. We don't do that anymore. We have phones to keep us distracted from looking too deeply into the shallowness of our lives. She had long walks where she had to think about her life. A woman who has had five husbands and the one she's living with now is not her husband. What do you suppose that was about? It sounds rough, sad, awful. It sounds like people around her might have said, "Oh, poor thing, bless her heart. She just can't keep a husband." They might have said, "What sin do you suppose she did that would cause so much repeated trauma in her life?"

We need people like her, so that we don't have to look too deeply into our own lives. She spent a lot of her life walking to the well...well, well, well... thinking about life and not having much of one. But one day she ran back with a spring in her step. A spring of Living Water, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Now! Her proclamation! Strikes me as a very unusual form of evangelism because when I think of evangelism, I think of someone asking, "Are you saved?" Evangelism is someone saying, "Do you know Jesus?" Evangelism is, "If you died today, where would you be in the afterlife, heaven or hell? Let me tell you about Jesus."

She takes a different tack. It isn't, "Do you know Jesus?" But rather, "There's someone who knows all about me." "I found someone who found me. Someone who knows me, all of me, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and this one came into this world not to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him." "Come and see this one who knows everything about me! He's not the Messiah, is he?"

The town goes to see this one, and they return saying a creed in unison. "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

The Word on the street. The Word that is compelling is that Jesus knows everything you've ever done...and does not condemn...but saves... John translates salvation as love. Now, think about that. Do you know everything you've ever done? My degree is in forgetting. I'm very good at it. I don't remember how I became so good at forgetting.

Some people are very good at remembering. I had a colleague in Durham, Elizabeth Michael, who possessed what seemed to me a photographic memory. I could say to Elizabeth, "What day of the week was June 8, 1992?" Without missing a beat, she would reply, "It was a Monday." She would write out her sermon, and then she could preach a sermon without using a note. Just memorized it. People say to me, "In your sermon, you said 'blah, blah, blah.'" My response is, "I don't remember what I said." "You just said it yesterday...." "Look! I've already moved on to next Sunday. Get busy living or get busy dying. I'm moving on." It's because I can't remember.

Can you remember everything you have ever done?

Some things stand out. Some good things. Some bad things can leave a scar. Some things we've done we have buried deep as bone in the dark of night, and pray nobody uncovers. Some things we have done, we wish we could go back and fix. Some things we did caused pain, but we were oblivious at the time. If we had known, we might have said at the time, "I'm sorry! I didn't mean that." Can you imagine being told everything you've ever done? Not sure I'd want to be told that!

But she says, "He knows! He knows everything I've ever done." And she finds that to be good news? How? Because the Lord comes "not to condemn the world, but so that the world might have life." He loves her.

Which, you might remember, is the new commandment: "I give you this new commandment. Love one another, just as I have loved you, so you also must love one another." Lord, if there's one law that we need to follow in this messed-up, broken, war-filled, angry world, it might just be that one. What if God wants a word with us? What if God wants us

to use this text as a way in which we should live and move and have our being? Here's the Word.

Jesus is in Samaria. He's gone over the border. To condemn the world? No.... So that the world might be saved and have life. "I give you this new commandment. Love another just as I have loved you; you also must love another."

Jesus speaks to a woman at a well. And she says, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" John adds in parentheses... just to put a finer point on it: "Jews do not share things in common things with Samaritans." Jews and Samaritans aren't in communion. Who said that word? God didn't say it: we say it. I mean, what word do you use to fill in the blank? "I don't share things in common with...." "I don't speak to...."

If you're looking for a Word... what if we chose the Word of God?

I give you a new commandment: "Love one another just as I have loved you; you also must love one another." Never mind putting the 10 commandments up in schools. Put this one in your heart. Jesus says, "Call your husband." "I don't have one." "I know. You've had five, and the one you have now isn't your husband."

She had a history... and Jesus says, "It's history." If anyone is in Christ, a new creation, the past is finished and gone. Everything has become fresh and new. "Love one another, just as I have loved you; you must also love one another." Jesus says, "You're right! You've had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband." The woman suddenly sees this guy as religious, "You must be a prophet." And so, her language changes.

And I know all about that. You know, before I was a pastor, I had a life! I was a television reporter, and no one ever brought up religion to me. I had interesting conversations. When I became a pastor, I was surprised that every conversation somehow becomes religious. "How are things at the church?" "How many weddings do you have this spring?" "Did you institute this quiet prelude thing for Lent?"

That's all she's doing. Majoring in religion. "We worship on this mountain, and you worship on that mountain. Blah... blah... blah...." And Jesus isn't interested in religious talk. Jesus is interested in you. Love one another just as I love you; you also must love one another.

"Come and see this one who knows everything about me. I'm loved!"

A conversation at high noon with a woman who had five husbands and is living with another. Jesus had the same conversation a chapter before with a Pharisee, holy and clean, but who had to come at night. Jesus will have the same conversation with a man born blind, a Ukrainian, a Russian, a Mexican, an Iraqi, an Iranian, a Turk, a jerk, a jailer, a prodigal, and a priest. Everyone. He knows everything about everyone. The whole world! And doesn't seek to condemn us.

Come and see this one who told me everything about me... and loves me. He'll love you, too. God wants to have a Word with you!