



WEEK 3: RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

JOHN 4: 7-14

In this well-known encounter, we see Jesus in respectful relationship with an 'other'. Jesus invites this 'other' to share what they know of God, and to give what they have to him.

Background: Jews vs Samaritans

There was a terrible history between Samaritans and Jews. Violence, grudges, and abuse were common between the two ethnicities. Circa 722 BC the Assyrians had entered Samaria and removed thousands of Jews, replacing them with settlers from Babylon, Syria, and other nations. These foreigners had introduced pagan gods and married Jewish people who remained. The Southern Jews (people of Judah) never forgot these marital and religious concessions, and they hated the Samaritans for them. The Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim in 128 BC. When Jesus was still a toddler (6 BC), a group of Samaritans dug up some Jewish bones and broke into the Jerusalem temple, entering the holy of holies and scattering the bones there. The Jewish leaders enlisted the Romans in retaliation and responded by destroying Samaritan villages and massacring Samaritans on Mount Gerizim.

Background: the road less travelled

Jesus decided to leave Judea and head towards home (Galilee). Rather than follow the usual route, he takes the geographically direct yet culturally incorrect path through the heart of Samaria. This is a path that many Jews, especially rabbis, would never have taken.

In the previous chapter, Jesus met with Nicodemus, an upright Jewish religious leader, in the dead of night. Skip forward a chapter, and Jesus is meeting a morally suspect and racially impure woman in the bright light of day.

The woman at the well was female, was morally suspect, and was a Samaritan. Like all Samaritans, she was seen by the Jews as a schismatic (Samaritans having built a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem), a heretic (Samaritans only followed the first five books of the Old Testament), and a mongrel (the Samaritans ancestry was questionable).

We could say the Son of God went out of his way (quite literally), to spend time with her because at that time:

- A Jewish man does not initiate conversation with an unknown woman
- A Jewish man does not publicly talk with a woman
- A Jewish man does not share anything with a Samaritan
- A rabbi should never acknowledge a woman as an equal

Unlike the prevailing attitudes of the time, Jesus views this woman positively. He treats her kindly and with respect. Yes, they were from different people groups, different faiths, and



different communities- yet Jesus carefully and gently crosses the traditional boundaries to talk with her. This is the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in the gospels. According to John's gospel, it is to her alone that Jesus discloses his true identity and is not as transparent with anyone else again until he stands before Pilate.

The well

Jacob's well had faithfully provided clean water for generations. It was deep and reliable (John 4:11). This well goes down over 20 metres and is still producing clear, chilled water. This site has remained one of the most well-known and visited biblical sites.

Did this woman know that wells were meeting places of men and women in Scripture? For example, Abraham's servant and Rebekah (Genesis 24: 1-61) as well as Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29: 1-20). It was at a well that Moses defends the seven daughters of the priest (Exodus 2: 15-21).

The water

Unsurprisingly, people living in the Middle East find water an exceptionally powerful image of God's presence and life (Amos 5: 24, Jeremiah 17: 13). It was also an important image for Jesus. In water Jesus was baptised, his first miracle was turning water into wine, he likens his life to living water (John 7: 37-39), and the book of Revelation tells us he will bring a river of life-giving water (Revelation 22: 1).

The woman

The woman at the well is initially cautious and hides her story from Jesus. We know very little about her, with the gospel only telling us that she had been married 5 times. Women had very few rights and divorce was easy for men. Women could not legally propose marriage or initiate divorce to a man, since marriage was an exchange of property, and the woman was technically the 'property'. A woman's livelihood and that of her children, if she had any, depended on having a husband. Maybe her first husband died or divorced her unfairly? Whatever the reason, after being married once (or worse still, twice), a woman probably had little choice between living in the streets or agreeing to another marriage with increasingly dodgy men.

And yet, Jesus takes her seriously. He listens respectfully to her beliefs, discusses faith with her, and points to the renewal of life (living water) that he alone can give. She joyfully accepts and hurries back to tell her people! Although she was most likely ostracised in her community, many listened to her and came to the well where they too meet the One who brings them renewed life.

"They said to the woman, 'we no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'"



John 4: 42

What do we learn from this interaction at the well on a hot day in Samaria? Jesus illustrates respectful relationship to us. He is compassionate. He asks her for help. He accepts her gift to him (water for his thirst). He talks with her, listens to her, and graciously meets her in anxiety and defensiveness. He talks theology with her as an equal and hears what she believes. He offers her more; the living water of the Spirit that will grow within her as she commits to the giver of life. Jesus isn't condescending or aggressive; Jesus engages with respect.

What do they talk about?

When Jesus asks her for water she responds cautiously and wisely. She is tangata whenua (people of the land) meeting manuhiri (visitors). She explains the things he clearly doesn't understand about her turangawaewae (standing, right of residence). As she explains the customs, she speaks of Jacob naming him as part of her whakapapa and therefore her cultural and religious heritage (John 4: 11).

She calls him "sir" and reminds him that he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. She poses a question to remind him of the cultural norms surrounding them: "How can you ask me for a drink when Jews and Samaritans don't have anything to do with each other?" (John 4:9).

She must have been wondering, who is this guy? Was he an opportunist after sex? A mad man? Is he dangerous?

How does Jesus respond? He talks and asks questions, gently and humbly. He praises some of the faith he finds in this woman. He treats her with gentleness and respect.

What is the outcome?

She and many in her community accept and believe Jesus is the Saviour of the world (John 4: 42).

They become followers of Jesus! But here's the kicker. They follow Jesus as they are:

1. Without becoming Jews
2. Without needing to worship in a new temple (Jesus' focus is not on where people worship but on a heart of worship in spirit and truth- John 4:23)
3. And without denying their Samaritan culture or their whakapapa

"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away"

John 6: 37

Who are the Samaritans of today for us?



Samaritans described themselves as followers of the true and better faith. They worshipped one God, followed Scripture and practiced worship in the right places. They followed a strong set of honour and shame expectations, particularly for women, and believed their prophet was returning at the end of the age. These are similar characteristics of contemporary followers of Islam. While Jesus never met a Muslim, we may sense how Jesus would respond to Muslims today by observing how he responded to the Samaritans. Unfortunately, some church leaders today will treat Muslims as the Jewish leaders of the day treated the Samaritans.

Jesus disciples needed some convincing when they went to a Samaritan village, as they wanted to pray that fire would rain down on the Samaritans. But as James, the brother of Jesus writes:

“The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit; impartial and sincere. Peace-makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

James 3: 17-18

Kindness and real dialogue always point to Jesus himself. We need to learn to engage like Jesus engaged- respectfully, humbly and genuinely.

What can we learn?

Respectful relationships with people who are ‘other’ in some way is **essential to the coming of gospel renewal**. This is one of our core values at NZBMS. To seek honest, committed, respectful relationships in which we can give and receive, learn and teach, lead and follow, direct and serve. We do this trusting Jesus in others and seeking the loving unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17. The unity that he said would cause the world to know that the Father sent him (John 17: 18-26 and 20-23).