

“Asking the Wrong Question”  
John 4:4-10

I invite you to open your bibles this morning to John chapter 4, the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. I want us to look at a portion of that story as Jesus meets her and she asks him a question. I want us to focus on that question today because I want us to realize that the question she asks of Jesus he immediately tells her is the wrong question. I think it is still a question that most people ask when they are first meeting Jesus. And it is a question that perhaps we have encouraged them to ask. I want us to see if we can recognize the better question as people come to meet Jesus, perhaps for the first time. John chapter 4, we'll begin with verse 4. It says,

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 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.) 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."  
John 4:4-10 NIV

Asking the wrong question. That's what happens as this woman first meets Jesus. Her first interaction with Jesus is one in which Jesus initiates that conversation. I think in all of our lives, I believe that the Holy Spirit is the first to contact us. I think that long before we have the idea of calling out to the Lord, God is already calling out to us. And so even that day, Jesus initiated a conversation with this woman, called her into a form of relationship with him, called her to do something, called her to be a part together with him in something.

But it's her question back that I find fascinating. It is a question that is trying to keep them separated. It is a question, that in spite of the fact that Jesus has approached her, in spite of the fact that Jesus has come to her willingly, she asks a question that tries to keep them apart. "Why are you talking to me? You're a Jew, and I am not only a Samaritan, but a Samaritan woman. No reason for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan, no reason for a man to speak to a woman. Why are you talking to me?"

It is as if she wants to clue Jesus in to the fact that she's not somebody he needs to be talking to. I don't see this as a question in which she's really being defensive. I think she may be worried about him. "What happens if somebody sees you talking to me? I'm not somebody that you are supposed to be dealing with." And so, she is trying to get Jesus to understand that there is a gulf between them, and that he should not be crossing it.

I think that there are a lot of people who respond in exactly that way the first time that they feel that conversation with God begin to happen in their lives. "Why are you talking to me? Don't you know who I am? Just as with the Samaritan woman, isn't it fairly obvious who I am; that I'm not somebody you should be talking to?" I think that most people are aware of their sin. They're aware of the fact that they are separated from God. They're aware of the fact that they are not who they have been created to be. And probably no one knows better than each of us the

real reasons why God has no business speaking to us. And so, that's how we respond. "Don't you know? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know what I am?" And we try to establish that separation and reject the movement of God to meet us.

One of the reasons that I think that happens is because we, today, as the church, proclaim that gospel. We are too busy proclaiming to people that they are not worthy of the kingdom of heaven. We are too busy telling people about their sin and their shortcomings. We're too busy telling them about all the reasons why God would not want to ever have anything to do with them. And they hear us. And they believe it.

As a result, what they have is a misunderstanding of who God is. That's what this woman's question reflects. It reflects a misunderstanding of who it is that is speaking to her. For her, this is just another Jewish man. For her, she doesn't know or understand who he is. And she does not understand why he would ask her this question. You see that Jesus explains that when he responds to her "if you knew who it was who was asking you, if you knew anything about me, if you had any understanding of who it is that stands before you and what I can do for you, that is not the question you would have asked." And that is still true in the world today.

Somehow, we've got to take the message of that misunderstanding back out to the world. That they have received, often from us, the wrong idea of who this Jesus is that's trying to reach them. They have misunderstood, and they have thought that this is a Jesus who doesn't want anything to do with them. They have misunderstood and they have believed in their hearts that there is such a separation that there's no reason for Jesus to care about them; there's no reason for him to even acknowledge their presence. As great as the gulf was between this Jewish man and this Samaritan woman, we have taught the world to believe that Jesus and them are never, ever going to come together. And that's wrong.

Jesus himself is clear to tell us in those verses that we love so much, John 3:16 (we can all quote it), but the verse right after that, John 3:17, he says that the Son of God didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. That's what's happening here with this woman. "I didn't come here today to this well to reject you. I didn't come today to tell you that there's nothing that can happen, even a conversation between us. If you knew who I really am, if you knew the love that I have for you, if you knew the forgiveness that is in my heart, and the desire for us to not be separated, you would not have asked that question. You would not have asked a question that tries to keep us apart."

Jesus replies with his answer to her question, "if you just knew who I was, you would have asked a different question. And the question that you would have asked, the question that you should have asked, was a question asking for a relationship, asking for eternal life. If you knew who I was, you would have asked and I would have given you living water."

She doesn't understand all of that at first, and they kind of go back and forth, until it dawns on her, it becomes very clear to her, who this man is. And she graciously, and excitedly, asks the right question, and comes into a relationship with Jesus that transforms her life. And she will go back into the town and she will proclaim it to everyone she knows, and invite them to come and see this man. It changes her life when when she finally asks the right question.

The world today needs to know how to ask the right question. We've got to be the ones to teach them that. We've got to teach them that they don't need to be coming to the Lord our God in fear and separation. That they don't need to come to him believing that he has nothing to say to them. Or that if he does find something to say, it will be something of rejection. Instead, we've got to tell them that if they really knew who our Jesus is, if they really knew his power to forgive, if they really knew his capacity to love us while we are yet sinners, if we can get them to

understand that he was willing to die for them, they'll begin to ask different questions. And they will begin to ask questions that seek to unite them with that Lord God instead of separate them.

We must present the proper picture of who Jesus Christ is to this world: a God who loves them, who gave his life for them, that "whosoever" believes in him would not perish. Even a Samaritan woman at a well. Even the "sinner" that you'll run into this week. Even the people we think Jesus doesn't care for. Whosoever.

Who do you know that has a misunderstanding of Jesus? Who do you know that's asking the wrong questions and concentrating on all the reasons why Jesus shouldn't have anything to do with them? Who do you need to introduce the real God to?

This morning we're going to have a time of invitation. And maybe that person this morning is you. Maybe you're the one that's felt like God has no relationship with you. Maybe you're the one who feels like you've done too much, or separated yourself too far, or whatever it may be. Maybe you've believed the lies that people have told you about that you're unlovable, unforgivable. Or maybe you know somebody, and you know they're hurting because they're separated from God, and you are the means to correct them and give them that proper understanding. Whatever decisions you need to make this morning, however you need to make them, in order to bring that unification together, you do that as we stand and sing.