



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"LOVEWELL" - Encounters With Jesus Series

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**G**ood morning everyone! I am so honored to have the opportunity to share the word of God with you today! It has been about seven months now since my wife Valerie, daughter Gianna, and I moved from Southern California to this amazing island. I have to say that we absolutely love the great beaches, culture, this church and the people of FPC. It has been an adventure for our little family and I cannot thank you enough for your love and support!

And while I am on the topic of love, today is Valentine's Day, the day of love! Now everyone pretty much falls into two categories regarding Valentine's Day. Either you love it, most likely because you are in love, and you are super excited to celebrate this day—and I bet if we look around the room we can tell who these people are by what they are wearing—or you simply can't wait for this mushy day to be done so you can move on with your life. No matter what category you fall under, everyone should enjoy reading with me some funny Valentine's cards I have seen this year.

Valentine's Day is a holiday that encourages people to speak and show their love for others. But what is even more interesting to me than goofy cards is the question, what is love?

For the band Haddaway and Will Ferrell in the movie "Night at The Roxbury," what is love? "Baby, don't hurt me."

Andy Gibb told us in 1978 that "Love Is Thicker Than Water."

Beyonce would say that love "has got her looking so crazy right now."

Whitney Houston would say, as she is leaving you, that's she will "Always Love You."

And Justin Bieber would say that he could be starving and broke, but everything is going to be okay "As Long As You Love Me."

Love is truly a powerful thing that authors write of, musicians compose of, poets rhyme of, and romantics dream of.

As I think about the topic of love, it is clear that while Valentine's Day is a celebration of love within humanity, the truth is that love is a gift that God has given us and that is worth celebrating and sharing with others. The Bible also defines love as a verb, something we put into action.

This is our seventh week of the sermon series, Encounters With Jesus. In these past six weeks we have seen Jesus' birth, Jesus at a wedding, Jesus calling His disciples, Jesus in the Jewish places of worship, and Jesus interacting with the local religious leaders.

Today, in the scripture we read, we Encounter Jesus at a well.

## THE HISTORY

You know, the book of John was written almost 2,000 years ago and it was written for a Jewish audience. And even though John was not writing with 21<sup>st</sup> century America in mind, the history and the message of

this story are things that are incredibly relevant for us today in 2016. That is why God's Word is not just recorded events, but it is a Living Word. So I am going to take you all quickly back through our story of Jesus and the woman at the well and highlight some of the amazing points that John is sharing.

There is one major historical issue that needs to be understood regarding this story: Two different ethnic groups are mentioned, the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other and the hatred was rooted in bloodlines and especially worship preferences. The Samaritan people as a race were only partially Jewish and were looked at as half-breeds by the Jewish people.

The biggest fights though were based on who had chosen the best place to build a temple for worship, the Jews or the Samaritans? There are writings that there were even civil wars and fights before the time of Jesus. Whatever their history had been before Jesus was born, the truth was these two groups despised each other. The Jews were taught that they should never come in contact or converse with a Samaritan. The relationship between the two was extremely hateful, racially bigoted, and fearful. Now, with that in mind, lets pick up the story and walk through it.

## THE STORY

John begins with the statement that Jesus has left Judea and is heading back to Galilee.

**A**nd to do so, He had to pass through Samaria. What is interesting about the statement that He HAD to pass through Samaria is that He actually didn't, physically speaking. The Jews hated the Samaritans so much that they didn't even want to step foot in Samaria so there was another, longer road that would take Jewish travelers around Samaria and into Galilee.

That road was twice as long and meant crossing the mighty Jordan River twice, but all the pain and extra travel was worth it, so long as you never had to come in contact with the Samaritan people. So when scripture says Jesus HAD to pass through Samaria, it is referring to something deeper than the physical. He is being led by the Holy Spirit through Samaria for a spiritual purpose.

The majority of this story takes place at a common location that you would find in any inhabited village or town during Jesus' life. It took place at a well. The well was the source of life for a town. It was their drinking water as well as water for their livestock.

Not only did it provide water to drink for the locals, but it was also a place where travelers would stop and refuel themselves and animals. And due to the long, physical process of filling jars, as well as having to wait your turn, the well was a social place; a place of interaction; a place of gossip. It seems to me that the well was the original Starbucks, or water cooler in the work place. And so we see Jesus and the Samaritan woman meeting at a well.

One final thought on this story: did you know that this passage of scripture is the longest recorded interaction between Jesus and an individual in all the gospels—which really means that the details of this story are extremely valuable and that this story is important to hear, for us to understand the message within it.

So, Jesus arrives at the well around noontime, the hottest time of the day. He is very weary and

somewhat falls onto the side area of the well, thirsty and worn out. And a woman arrives soon after Him. She is coming to get water for herself and her home. Now, for her to come get water for herself means that one, she did not have any children to help her or servants so she is most likely poor, definitely the lower class, and is having to provide for herself.

The second point is that people would most likely go to the well in the cool of the morning to beat the heat and also to supply all the water needs for that day. However, this woman comes later in the day, most likely because she thinks no one will be around and does not want interaction.

This woman is never given any other name than "The Samaritan Woman." However, this title she is known by speaks volumes to the reader, especially if you are Jewish. Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, begins interacting with not only a woman, but a Samaritan woman. This act is deeply defiant to the cultural norms of that time. And right away the woman, most likely stunned, asks Jesus if He is nuts! She knows He is Jewish, probably by His physical appearance and speech, and here He is talking to her and she questions His actions.

Jesus continues His interaction with her by saying that if she knew the Gift God was offering her at this very moment, and who Jesus really was, she would be asking Him for living water.

The conversation goes back and forth. Jesus is speaking metaphorically regarding the well and water, but the woman continues taking Him literally and asks him to show her where she can find the living water He is referring to.

Jesus tells her that if she knew who He was and the gift that God was offering her at that moment, she would be asking Jesus for a drink and He would give her a water that will quench her thirst forever and

give eternal life. And thinking literally, she asks where she can find this water so that she won't have to keep filling her jar every day? Now, I am thinking she might be wondering if the heat has gotten to Jesus' head or something. Obviously we cannot survive without water daily, so if she is thinking literally, it probably sounded funny to hear what Jesus said to her.

Then all of the sudden, Jesus changes the direction of the conversation, with the purpose of giving her clarity, and to reveal His power and authority. And He starts with the state of her heart.

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman to go and get her husband and she replies, "I don't have a husband." While we cannot be sure exactly the tone of her voice, it seems that she is wanting to end the conversation regarding husbands right away with Jesus. It is a topic that is not up for discussion. And in the next comment by Jesus, we can see why.

Jesus says she is right! She doesn't have a husband. She has had five in the past and is now currently living with a man who is not her husband.

Ouch! Jesus knows who this woman truly is and the state of her heart. But while this may seem harsh and painful for the woman to hear, she stays and begins asking for spiritual direction, rather than running away in offense. She probably stayed because it is pretty unusual to have someone you have never met actually know the things you hide in your heart. This would have to be someone who has a special connection to God. She recognizes He is a prophet and then begins talking "religion" with Him.

There have been so many times that I am having normal conversations with people and the moment they find out I work for a church, they all of the sudden become spiritual people as well.

**T**hey will say things like, "I used to go to church growing up," or "I go every once in a while." Another favorite is, "I am a Christian. I read my Bible, but I don't believe in religious establishments so I don't attend a church."

And while I don't know for sure, it looks as if the woman in our story is doing the same thing with Jesus. So Jesus answers her with one of the most powerful scriptures in the Bible. I want to quote them again for you all.

He says, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..."

Jesus says that worship is no longer about a location, building, ethnicity, or set of rituals. It is no longer something out of reach. True worship comes from the spirit, from within the heart of each person.

The woman responds to Jesus by saying that someday the Messiah will come and explain all of this to them. And finally, Jesus, flat out tells her that He is the Messiah!

So let's fast-forward to the end of the story. The woman runs back into town and tells everyone to come out to the well with her and listen to the teachings of Jesus. She tells everyone that he told her everything she had ever done, AKA her sin, and asks the question, "Can this be The Christ?"

The town comes out to see and hear this man Jesus and the Bible says that many people came to believe in Him because of His word.

#### THE MESSAGE

As we have looked through seven weeks worth of Encounters with Jesus, there are reoccurring messages within these stories. Jesus is constantly living His life led by the Holy Spirit, with eyes wide open to the world He lives in. Jesus is challenging the hyper

religious, loving the broken, calling the outcasts, and today, in this story, we see Jesus doing the same thing.

But this story is not just a nice story that shows us how amazing Jesus was; this story is a message from God to us today. It gives us direction for our very own lives if we will apply it. So, what is the message for you and I today? What is this scripture saying to us?

The first message from this story today is that **Jesus always meets people where they are and how they are.**

What is amazing to me is that Jesus offers this woman the gift of eternal life before she knows who He is and before she realizes He knows her sin. Jesus knew the details of her life from the beginning of their interaction, when He first asked for water. Jesus knew she was a Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews. He knew she was a woman jumping from relationship to relationship, making bad life decisions, that she had shame and sin. And yet in the midst of that, He offers her the gift of eternal life and love.

Imagine the surprise and curiosity she must have had that afternoon when she left home, ready for her hard work of drawing and carrying water, and ends up meeting Jesus. She didn't know what her day was going to look like, but God knew. She didn't know who Jesus was, but He knew her. And she didn't understand what living water was, but Jesus took time and showed her through His acceptance and kindness. Jesus met the woman at the well, in her daily routine. Jesus will meet us exactly where we are at in our lives.

You know, sometimes I fall into a mental trap that tells me that before I can come to God and receive His love and forgiveness for my sin, I first need to be a better person. That I need to try harder and if I succeed then I can come to God, knowing that I am good enough and can hold

my head high. And maybe some of you feel that way as well.

Or maybe you are so distracted by the duties and responsibilities of life that you are going through your routine, just trying to survive day to day.

Or still, maybe you think the only place where you can meet with Jesus is in a church building.

Yet when I read this story, I see Jesus meeting this woman at the local town well, loving her and offering her eternal life, where she was and how she was. Jesus met her and surprised her with grace before she ever did anything right, spiritual, or good.

And if Jesus is the perfect picture of God in heaven, then I fully believe that God deals with us today in the same manner and the worst thing I can do is wait to drink from the loving well of Jesus until I am a better person. No, I need to grab that bucket of living water and not sip, but swim in His grace and love.

I believe there are people here today who can totally associate with the woman in this story. You go through your daily routine, distracting yourself from pain and rejection and your own mistakes. You have distanced yourself from others, and God. And you may say, "Ryan, you don't know me...there is no way God would offer me this living water. If I showed up at the well that day, Jesus would have immediately stood up and walked away."

Well, the story in John ends with the comment that many believed because of the words of Jesus and the testimony of the woman...and I think we should do the same thing here today.

So if you are skeptical to the idea that God loves you, here are teaching from the Word of God regarding His love for us.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** - *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our sin, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”*

**Psalm 86:15** - *“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”*

**John 3:16** - *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only son.”*

**1 John 3:16** - *“This is how we know what love is; Christ Jesus laid down His life for us.”*

**1 John 4:9-11** - *“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.”*

So the Word of God tells us over and over again that God loves us! I also know that this room is full of the testimonies of people who have tasted of the LOVEWELL named Jesus and we know by our own experience that it is true, He is all we need and He will meet us where we are and how we are. If you have tasted the love of God and it has changed your life, can you raise your hand up today? Look around you!

If you feel like as if you relate to the woman at the well, I want to encourage you today that the teachings of the Bible and the testimony of the people around you today scream that Jesus offers you the same thing He offered the woman at the well...His love.

And I pray that because of the Word of God and the testimony of many in this room today, you too will believe in Jesus, just as the town did in the story.

The second application of this story is that Jesus' example teaches us how to LOVEWELL.

This is a powerful story of the love God has for us, but it is also a profound example of what it means to love others.

Look at that final scripture verse that I just shared from 1 John 4: *“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.”*

There are so many ways that Jesus showed kindness and love to this woman. Notice that Jesus was exhausted and He was on a journey. He didn't have to stay there and talk to the woman. And He definitely didn't have very much energy, yet He not only sees her at the well, He makes a point to spend time with her. Jesus simply saw a woman and showed her kindness and love. What a simple gift through conversation, yet the result is an entire town got to meet and believe in Jesus!

Do you really think that Jesus needed her help? Did the Son of God really need her to give him a drink? No, He did not. He was not starting the conversation for Himself, but for her for he had a Living Water that would change her life.

When I look at Jesus' ministry example, I see that true love and care for others is completely unconditional. When we love others, we share kindness, friendship, time, resources and grace—we do not share because we will get something in return. We LOVEWELL because Jesus has loved us well, with no strings attached.

When we use Jesus' example of love, how do we measure up? How does FPC measure up? What would our surrounding communities like Kaneohe say about us? That we LOVEWELL, or just okay, or not at all?

Jesus constantly teaches His followers to love their neighbors.

And while it matters that we love one another who are within our church community, the true test of love is how we act towards those outside this church community. Loving well truly happens outside the four walls of this church and campus and every one of us who are followers of Jesus are called as ministers to spread the love of Jesus with others in all we do.

My final thought is this. Think what your life would look like if you tasted the LOVEWELL today. Think of how different life could be if it is true that God loves you so much and He wants to lead you in a new way of living. I pray you receive His love today.

Think what our church would look like if we loved well? What acts of kindness, ministries, conversations, social interaction discipleship and services would be created/changed? What would the people look like who come to worship here at FPC? What things would matter most to us individually and as a church? Dream of what God is calling this church to. We all can love well on our own, but imagine what God can do through us as we all love well together!

I pray you dream and are inspired and act on what God reveals to you.

Let's pray. God, I pray that you will open our eyes to see the wonderful mystery of Your love. That we, here today, on this Valentine's Day, will come to You, the LOVEWELL and drink from it, and then, in return, go out into the world we live in daily and together as one community learn to LOVEWELL.

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*Note: Sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org). The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*