

## Come and See

John 4:1-42

Slide 1 – introduction

Slide 2 – Joshua Bell

I wonder if the name Joshua Bell is familiar to you? No?

Nor me, to be fair... but it turns out he's one of the world's preeminent violinists.

All the cool kids know this.

In 2007, during peak hour in a Washington DC subway station, Joshua Bell busked anonymously on a \$4 million Stradivarius violin.

Thousands hurried past. He collected just over fifty dollars over the time he played \$20.00 of that was from a commuter that recognised him.

You can look it up on YouTube. It's fascinating.

**Sometimes something extraordinary is right in front of us, and we don't see it. Sometimes, for varying reasons, we CAN'T see it.**

**But, when we slow down a bit and take the time to reflect we can encounter extraordinary things.**

I think John 4 is like this.

Slide 4 – The Well

A familiar story that has become invisible. We think we've "got it". That we understand the reason why John has chosen to put this in his gospel. Nothing left to see here. Move on.

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Alternatively, we might be very wary of this story.

At a glance it can look like another historical example of a woman's life and experience being used as a footnote for a cautionary tale...where Jesus digs into her past in some sort of moral **gotcha** moment.

But look again. Something astonishing is happening at this well.

It's noon. It's hot. Jesus is tired – it's a very human picture of a Jesus whose humanity we too quickly look past. His friends have gone into town to find food. He sits by a well in the semi-desert of Samaria. There's a lone woman there, who has come to draw water.



And then Jesus does something culturally unthinkable.

**He speaks to her.**

He asks this woman - a Samaritan woman - for help.

**“Could you give me a drink?”**

#### SLIDE 5 Jesus and Woman

To our ears this sounds small. Insignificant. In his world, (and hers) it's seismic. It shakes the foundations of who talks to who.

**Who counts and who doesn't.**

**Who is above and who is below.**

**Who should be greeted and who should be ignored.**

#### SLIDE 6 – Left Out

Jesus upends a strictly set moral order. The astonishment of both the woman herself AND his disciples speaks, to the depth of this moral code. It's baked into the cultural and religious recipe.

This is not simply an archaic custom. We too live in a world of unspoken rules around who has power, dignity, value and esteem.

Who gets to speak and who has to remain silent. Who gets noticed and who gets ignored.

All communities have their lists of “ins” and “outs”. In this story, Jesus as a Jewish man is ‘in’ and this woman as a Samaritan female is most definitely ‘out’.

**But this is not the way of the Kingdom Jesus is revealing.**

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#### SLIDE 6 LONG BAY YARD

Many years ago I spent some time visiting inmates at Long Bay Gaol in Sydney.

I was introduced to various men at different points of their sentences through the chaplain there. I got to hear many of their stories.

One anecdote I heard several times but never met the man was of an old prisoner who had spent many years imprisoned for a violent crime.



Like most inmates he would walk the yard back and forth through the day, partly for exercise, partly to pass the time.

On the day of his release the chaplain told me he was led out of the prison with a small bag of his belongings and basic instructions on how to navigate public transport. Nobody met him at the gate.

He walked for about 30 metres and stopped dead as if held by an invisible force. He couldn't step forward.

The yard he had walked for decades was 30 metres in length.

He had become used to that as his world. He had normalized it. Ingrained it. Hard wired it.

Once things become ingrained they are hard to shift.

In the story we are looking at, we have rules relating to gender, ethnicity and morality. Jesus stomps on all of them.

#### SLIDE – Woman and Jesus at Well

For centuries theologians and preachers have cast this woman as the *problem* or the *project*. Someone to fix, rescue, or avoid. But Jesus refuses all of that. He begins with **need** - his own...and therefore with **her dignity**.

**This is not a strategy. It is recognition:**

*She has something he needs. She is someone whose **agency** matters.*

It's classic, strength based social work.

"Could you give me a drink?"

And she rises to meet him. Sharp, witty and un-intimidated:

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?"

It is HER, not JESUS, who names the fault lines: ethnicity, religion, gender, history.

It's sassy.

And please note, Jesus does not **dismiss** her intellect, as if she has just tried to shift the focus of the conversation because she's embarrassed, by redirecting it (and thereby reducing her). He welcomes it.

Their conversation shimmers like the living water Jesus speaks of.



It's a meeting of brilliant minds.

Many of us have come to believe that when Jesus speaks to her past he does so to bring her to a point of repentance – **that she should publicly recognise her sin and turn from it**...because this is what many of us have learned is the key process in relationship with God.

And we are on sure theological ground when we speak about the healthy process of confession and repentance. It's just that that is NOT what is happening here.

When Jesus names her life - five husbands, plus the man she's with now - it is not to **shame** her. It is to **see** her.

This IS the situation. This IS her life. This is THE CONTEXT.

Jesus uses this moment to tell the truth without weaponising it.

In following Jesus we start at THE START.

She came at noon to avoid the gaze of others. Jesus meets her there - not with judgement, but with clarity and compassion.

It's a remarkable scene.

Her response is equally remarkable -

“Your people say worship in Jerusalem. Ours say this mountain.”

Jerusalem...Mount Gerazim...

Theologically speaking, it was a big and very current question. The kind of question debated by the great men in the important places in the big cities.

But here they are - a worn-out rabbi and a woman with a complicated past - speaking as colleagues in discernment.

Jesus then widens the horizon:

He says: The hour is coming when worship is not about mountains or temples, not about insiders or outsiders, but about Spirit and truth - **for all**.

And something suddenly catches in her heart...“**I know that Messiah is coming. He'll sort it out...**”

And Jesus tells *her* what he withholds from the powerful: “**I am he.**”

The first explicit self-revelation in John's Gospel is entrusted not to a priest or a king or a politician...but to a Samaritan woman – and a morally complicated one at that.



If you're keeping score of cultural expectations and religious etiquette... that's Jesus 1, Gatekeepers 0.

**And then the point of this whole interaction becomes apparent: She becomes a leader.**

She leaves her jar standing there and heads back to her village.

**Why leave the jar?** Because she's carrying something else now. This is the water analogy again. She's carrying...embodying...living water. She runs into town, and says the line that changes her village forever:

**"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Could this be the Christ?"**

She is not a cautionary tale.

She is a **witness**.

Steve Clark and David story...

"I didn't send David to you so you could heal him, Steve...I sent David to you to heal you."

At Wesley Mission, our calling is to do all the good we can because every life matters - especially for those most in need.

The story of Steve and David echoes the story of this interaction with Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Notice that Jesus does not stand above this woman as a **saviour dispensing charity downward**. He stands **beside her as a neighbour** who asks for help. He dignifies her capacity to give, decide, lead.

This is the opposite of paternalism.

It says: *You are not a project. You are a person with gifts we cannot do without.*

Communities are reborn when people on the margins are invited into **the centre** to speak.

It's sacred.

Jesus recruits her.

Entrusts her.

Honours her mind and her spirit.

**And through her**, an entire town comes to faith.

No big strategic announcement.

No campaign.

Just a conversation that begins in thirst and ends in widened hospitality.



And we can ALL walk in that same spirit.

As we consider the future at Woden Valley and the substantial development that is in the plans, let us commit to –

SLIDE – The Well

(CLICK ON EACH DOT POINT)

1. **Coming alongside and sharing our common humanity first.**
2. **Honouring the intellect and wisdom of those around us**
3. **Refusing shame.** Tell truth without humiliating.
4. **Recruit and empower.** Share the work. Pass the mic.
5. **Aim at communal renewal.** Salvation is personal but never private.

The story we have explored this morning – and perhaps today looked at through a different lens – tells us that relationship with God is not principally experienced through hierarchy and dominance, but rather through mutuality. We join WITH God in the renewing of all things.

So let this be our persuasion today:

Jesus begins by asking an unnamed woman for help and then she becomes the catalyst for a community's awakening.

**This is not an exception - this is the pattern.**

Cup by cup, question by question, woman by woman, village by village - until the whole world tastes the living water.

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And one final thought - somewhere in this story, each of us is the one who comes to the well at noon.

Somewhere in this story, each of us is offered the opportunity to become an agent of God's Good News Kingdom.

And each of us can also be the one who says, **“Come and see.”**