In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In my opinion, this is one of the greatest stories in the New Testament, maybe even the whole Bible! We do not always get the opportunity to read the whole story — it’s quite long as you just heard. Sometimes a part of it is left out, but not today.

And because it is so long, many sermons on various topics could be preached! In fact, we could spend the rest of the day working our way through this text — but we don’t have all day. So today I want to focus on one aspect of the story. I want to focus on these final verses:

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”
40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, “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.” (John 4:39-42)

My theme is this — Evangelism! You see, I believe that the unnamed Samaritan Woman who encountered Jesus at Jacob’s well could very well be the first evangelist! — the first to have witnessed to Jesus as the Savior of the world. The Twelve do not seem to have done this so far, but this woman does! And in this story, Jesus reveals to us the way in which evangelism is to be done. In other words, this story shows us how people like you and me are brought to Jesus and then draw others into fellowship with him.

Let me take that apart a bit. Jesus comes to Jacob’s well and he is tired and thirsty so he sits down to rest while the disciples go off to find something to eat. The woman from Samaria comes along in the heat of the day — which apparently was an unusual time for a woman to come to the well. Usually, the women would come to fetch water early in the morning while it was still cool. That she comes at noon leads some Biblical scholars to think that she was not welcome to associate with the other women.
Perhaps that is so, if her past had been questionable.

In any case, Jesus speaks to her, another unusual thing for that time and place. A man and an unaccompanied woman would not speak to each other — it just wasn’t done. And the fact that Jesus was a Jew and the woman a Samaritan made it extremely unusual. So right from the beginning of the story we can tell that something extraordinary is going on.

Now Jesus and the woman are not exchanging pleasantries. They do not talk about the weather or just make polite conversation. No — they go right to the heart of the matter. Jesus wants her to know that she has encountered no ordinary Jewish man. He begins by saying some strange things to her — telling her that he could give her “living water.” She is confused by that since he’s the one who asked her for a drink, for he has no way to get water out of the well. But then she goes from being confused to being interested, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” That would certainly make life easier for her.

So far she is thinking in very concrete terms. So Jesus changes the subject and tells her to go get her husband. This gives him a chance to reveal to her how much he already knows about her! That must have been startling, to say the least! To her credit, she hangs in there saying, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.” To be a prophet means that Jesus speaks for God — that God gives him the words and he speaks them.

So you see how, bit by bit, this Samaritan woman comes to realize that she has encountered a man who just might be the Messiah — the promised one sent by God to save His people. And, once she has realized this, what does she do? Does she go home and go about her business? Does she think to herself, “well, how about that!” and then forget about it? No! She rushes back into town and starts to tell everyone — Come and see! I think I might have found the messiah!

Meanwhile, the disciples return and are scandalized that Jesus has been talking to this Samaritan woman. They don’t have the nerve to ask him about it. Instead they focus on whether or not he has had lunch. Here they are, day by day, walking and talking with Jesus, learning all about the Kingdom of God and witnessing all the wonderful things he does for others. Do they go into the city to tell everyone? No, they go to buy lunch for themselves. I do not blame them for wanting lunch; I just note that the Bible says nothing about their witnessing to Jesus, in spite of all the good
things they have learned about him.

But the woman is so thrilled by this astonishing encounter that she is bursting to tell anyone who will listen. She is overflowing with the news, telling them all about her conversation with him and how he seemed to know her even before they had met. I can’t help but think of the psalmists words:

1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me;*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,*  
but you, 0 LORD, know it altogether. \(\text{Psalm 139}\)

He knew everything about me, she exclaims! Because of her testimony, the people left the city and headed out to Jacob’s well to see this remarkable man for themselves. She was persuasive! Passionate and convincing! She spoke to her neighbors from her heart. This encounter with Jesus changed her — for the better! And she wanted to share that transformative experience with others. She could not keep it to herself!

On the basis of her testimony they came to see Jesus themselves. They invited him to stay there with them, which he did - for two days. I imagine those two days were full of Jesus’ teaching and doing all the things he always did — healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf, making the lame leap for joy, and perhaps even raising the dead. But most of all he preached good news — the good news of God’s love and forgiveness — for that is what attracted the woman at the well in the first place.

After those two days the people said that they had first come to Jesus because of the woman’s testimony, but now, having come to Jesus, they believed because of their encounter with him and with the Word that he proclaimed.

So this is the pattern of evangelism! This is how we bring people to Jesus and to fellowship with Him in His church. First, we notice how we have been changed by our encounter with Jesus — by our many encounters
with Jesus over the years that we have followed him and listened to his word. Second, we must be passionate about the transformation that has happened in us! So passionate that we want to share it with others. What is it that God has done for you? How has your fellowship with Jesus changed you — for the better? What are the many undeserved gifts you have received from God — gifts that continue to bring you hope and joy and the kind of peace that the world cannot give?

Who can you tell about all this? What neighbors do you have that need what you have found in your encounters with Jesus? How can you tell them about the One who knows everything about you-(and I mean everything!) and still loves you enough to lay down his life for you? Isn’t that incredible and amazing? How can you say to someone else - come and see! I have found the Messiah!

Granted, our world is very different from the world of the Samaritan woman in first century Middle East. However, the pattern of Evangelism is the same. We have something really good to share with the world! When we invite people to come and meet Jesus, we are doing a good thing! And then, we must show them Jesus — by our liturgy, through our proclamation of God’s Word, and by the way we conduct ourselves with one another. We must love one another just as Jesus has loved us. We must reveal how the transformative power of God’s Word and Spirit has been at work in us and among us for the good of our own lives and for the sake of the world.

I’m not saying this is easy, but it is what we are called to do — as Jesus’ disciples in this time and place — you and me and all the people of God. As Jesus said to the disciples, “look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.” Do not focus overmuch on lunch, there is work to be done! For the sake of the world — so that all may know that this Jesus “is truly the Savior of the world.” To him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen