



I like to eat. One of my wife's many gifts is that she is a great cook. I love to eat her food. In almost 35 years of marriage I can count on one hand the meals she's cooked that I've not enjoyed. And we love to eat together. We love to go out to eat together and try new places. Now that we live in San Carlos we have a goal to try every restaurant on Laurel Street. Eating is our joint hobby.

So this week as I was preparing for this message I was given pause when I ran across a question: When was the last time you were so excited about something you forgot to eat? You've experienced that, right? You get so excited about something, you get so caught up doing something you love to do, that you kind of lose track of time and forget to eat. I asked myself that question and I was kind of ashamed because I couldn't think of a time that ever happened to me!

I learned this week about George Frideric Handel and how he wrote his masterpiece, *The Messiah*. One of the most amazing things about the way he composed the *Messiah* is what a short time it took him. The work was finished in just a few weeks of sustained activity, and during that time he went for long periods without food. He said he felt carried along by the music, which he could scarcely get down on paper fast enough. When it was all finished, he looked back on that time as a visionary experience of heaven. And it makes sense when you consider how that composition has given so much joy to people and shared the message of Jesus in a beautiful and compelling way.

Of course it would be hazardous to our physical health if this kind of exhilaration was our everyday experience. But this seems to be exactly what Jesus experienced in John 4. Let me give you some background. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Galilee and had to pass through Samaria. He got into an extended conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well near the village of Sychar. This was a one-on-one conversation. Jesus had sent his disciples into town to buy food. And while they were there, Jesus offered this woman what he called "living water" that would spring up within her to eternal life. It took her a little while to grasp what Jesus was talking about but by the end of the conversation she'd come to believe he was the promised Messiah. Her faith wasn't fully developed yet, but it was in embryonic form and well on its way to birth. It was at this point in the story that the disciples returned to find Jesus talking with this woman.

Story: A Harvest in Samaria

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" (John 4:27).

Why were they surprised? Because not only was she a Samaritan, and Jews didn't associate with Samaritans, but because she was a woman. Men, especially rabbis like Jesus, weren't supposed to interact alone with women. There may be even more to this. The disciples saw Jesus was having a conversation about spiritual things with this woman. Jewish leaders taught that instruction in spiritual things was for men alone. To teach women or girls was considered a waste of time; a profaning of sacred things. But Jesus clearly thought otherwise and disregarded that as he interacted with this woman. The disciples don't quite know what to do with this.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him (verses 28–30).

Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman decides it's time to go. She leaves her water jar and heads back to the village. Although she'd come to the well to draw water, that's secondary now; something else has gotten a hold of her. She wants to tell the people of her village about this unusual man she just met. She says, "**He told me everything I ever did.**" That's an understandable exaggeration. He **did** tell her a few things, but not everything. But she's excited and when you're excited you say things like that. Then she adds a question, "**Could this be the Messiah?**" At this point, I'm pretty sure she believed he **was** the Messiah, but she wants them to come and see for themselves. She's not trying to convince them of anything. She's certainly not a theologian with everything figured out. She just wants them to meet this guy and come to their own conclusion. And that's just what they do. Even though this woman is something of a social outcast, they're willing to accept her invitation and come and see for themselves.

So there's this vivid contrast between the woman's enthusiasm, which is just kind of bubbling over, and the disciples' narrow skepticism. The disciples are far more concerned with food than they are with the Samaritan people. Look what happens back at the well.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?” (verses 31–33).

Remember, the disciples had gone back to the village to fetch food. They've come back with their baskets full and want Jesus to eat. But when he says that he has a secret source of food, they think, “Where did he get that? Did someone beat us to the punch and bring him food while we were gone?” You can understand if they're a little ticked off. They just busted their rear ends to bring him some food and now he says he'd already eaten and he's not telling where he got the food!

But, as usual, Jesus is trying to teach them a deeper spiritual truth. Look what he says in verse 34.

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

Now Jesus tells them his secret: doing the will of his Father and finishing the work he's given him to do was his sustenance; that's what kept him going. Instead of draining him, that work enriched him; it sustained him; it satisfied him. Remember, when Jesus came to the well he was tired and thirsty. But as he interacted with this woman, as he saw the light bulbs turning on in her soul, he began to feel energized and exhilarated. He was absorbed in what was happening in this woman's life; so absorbed he forgot he hadn't eaten in a while. He's not saying that if we're really spiritual we won't need to eat or sleep, but there's something more important than eating and sleeping, and that's doing God's will and work. There are times when to be like Jesus means we have a passion for God's work that runs so hot we sometimes forget even about our own physical needs.

Starting in verse 35 Jesus continues and applies this principle to the particular kind of work they were involved in at that very moment.

“Don't you have a saying, ‘It's still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor” (verses 35–38).

You don't have to be a farmer to understand what Jesus is saying here. When he talks about the harvest, he's using a figure of speech that points to people receiving eternal life. That's what was happening in this woman's life; the woman they'd snubbed. And that's what was about to happen in the lives of many other Samaritans who were on their way out to see him at that very moment. Notice he says to them in verse 38, *“I sent you...”* He's sent them into this harvest and he wants them to know a few things as they go. First, he wants them to have a sense of

urgency. Once a field is ready for harvesting, you'd better get out there and do the work. Jesus says it's not like you can sit around for four months and wait. There's no lag time between sowing and reaping; the time for harvesting is now!

He also wants them to know they only get the privilege of reaping because someone else has gone before them and sown. He's probably talking about prophets like John the Baptist, who prepared the way. Finally, he wants them to know that there's joy in the harvest, and the joy is shared by both sowers and reapers. Normally, sowers and reapers don't get to rejoice together, but now they do.

It's interesting, when Jesus says in verse 35 *“the fields are ripe for harvest,”* literally it says they are *“white for harvest.”* Scholars never knew what to do with that because fields aren't white, but then a few years ago a scholar named H.V. Morton was sitting by the same Samaritan well and made a very important discovery: “As I sat by Jacob's Well a crowd of Arabs came along the road from the direction in which Jesus was looking, and I saw their white garments shining in the sun. Surely Jesus was speaking not of the earthly but of the heavenly harvest, and as he spoke I think it likely that he pointed along the road where the Samaritans in their white robes were assembling to hear his words.”

I think that's what Jesus meant. If they just opened their eyes, there was, quite literally, a white harvest of Samaritans ready right in front of them.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. 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 Savior of the world” (verses 39–42).

Don't you love this woman? The disciples come back with lunch; she comes back with the whole city! A mini revival erupts in that little village of Sychar. Some of them believed because of the woman's own testimony. Don't you love that? God used a well-known adulterous woman to evangelize that little community! Others came to faith after he agreed to stay in town for two more days. I love that, too! Can you imagine his disciples? “We have to stay here in this godforsaken town with these dirty Samaritans?” But it was because they stayed that even more came to hear him and believe. Don't you love what they said to the woman, “Now we get what you were talking about. Now we believe not just because of what you told us but because what we ourselves have come to see: this man is the Savior of the world!” The story ends there because that's what John wants us to know: He's not just a Savior of the Jews. Salvation may come from the Jews, but this Savior is for the whole world.

Principle: Living Water is Meant to Overflow

When a person gets a hold of that, or should I say when that gets a hold of him or her, that changes everything. This woman had been looking for satisfaction her whole life. She'd moved from one relationship to the next, hoping to quench a thirst within her for love and meaning and significance. But something always seemed to go wrong. And now she's living with a guy, isolated from friends and family, ashamed, hardened, perhaps bitter. Then this Jesus comes along and changes everything. He offers her living water. She drinks and for the first time in a long time she feels clean; she feels loved; she feels joy; she feels purpose. You see, this living water is meant to overflow, and for her it overflowed right onto these people she'd known her whole life, even a few ex-husbands (four to be exact)! I find it humorous that Jesus had said, *"Go, call your husband and come back."* I wonder if she did that? I wonder if she knocked on the doors of all four of these guys and told them about Jesus and invited them out to the well?

Living water is meant to overflow. When Jesus transforms your life, your life is filled and you want to share it with others. It's contagious in a good way. You get the flu and you stay away from people because you don't want them to get sick. But you get this, you get infected with what the gospel offers (forgiveness, hope, joy, meaning) and that drives you not **away** from people but **towards** people. You want them to have what you have. You want them to catch what you caught.

There are some important things we learn in this story about what this looks like. Let me shape this in terms of the **Who**, the **What**, the **Where**, the **How**, and the **Why**.

The WHO

This story teaches us it's not always who you expect. As we've seen, this Samaritan woman wasn't the kind of person you'd want identified with your cause. If you're trying to sell something, you line up people to endorse your product that others respect and admire. You don't recruit someone like this woman. She's morally stained. For her, monogamy meant one man at a time. But God loves to use women and men like this to represent him. When they meet Jesus and their lives begin to change their witness has a potency that surpasses that of the pious.

Years ago, when I was in youth ministry we were often told that if you want to reach a high school for Christ you had to go after the leaders first. If you can get the leaders (the jocks and cheerleaders and movers and shakers) in the school to come to your group and give their lives to Christ then everyone else will follow. But it never worked. Instead, God brought us ordinary kids from every group on campus and he used them to share their story with their friends. And sometimes he'd use one of the most rebellious kids of all, the kid everyone thought was the least likely of all to come to faith, and he'd use that kid as a powerful witness to his friends.

The WHAT

I'm talking about what this woman actually did. All she really did was tell her story. She didn't have all the i's dotted and t's crossed before she shared her faith. She just went and told people what she'd experienced. She didn't wait until she got a seminary degree or even took a class on how to share your faith. She just testified to the fact that this guy told her everything she'd ever done. You may not be able to explain the gospel as well as Billy Graham. You may not be able to answer every question thrown at you about the Bible or Jesus or what the church believes. But you can tell your story. You can tell people what he's done in your life.

I heard a story about a Welsh coal miner who jumped to his feet in the middle of a sermon and led the whole church in a worship song. Later the pastor asked him about it and the man said he'd been a Christian only a few months and it was all so wonderful he couldn't sit still while the Bible was being preached! He said, "I was a bad lot. I drank. I pawned the furniture to buy beer. I abused my wife. And now life is real life, and so worthwhile." The pastor asked him how his friends down in the pit responded. He laughed and replied, "Today they asked me, 'You don't really believe that old tale about Jesus turning the water into wine, do you?'" To which he answered, "I know nothing about the water into wine, but I know this: in my house Jesus has turned beer into furniture; and that's a good enough miracle for me!"

Everyone loves a story, and when people hear the story of a changed life, they'll listen. It's not your job to convince anyone of anything. That's up to God. Your job is to tell your story and invite them to come and see for themselves that he is the Savior of the world.

The WHERE

Just like the Samaritan woman, and just like kids I worked with on the high school campus, and just like that coal miner, start with the people you know. Start with your family. Share with your friends. Share with the people you work with and your neighbors. Many of these people may hear your story and decide, "Well, that's nice for you but that's not for me." But keep praying for them. Keep loving on them. Keep living your life in front of them and let them see the reality of how your faith has affected your life. Stay positioned in their lives so when a crisis hits they feel you might be a person they could turn to. I have several friends I'm praying for right now who don't know the Lord. Most of them I've known for 10–20 years. I still pray for them. I still try to be a part of their lives. I still try to find ways to expose them to truth.

The HOW

Here's where we can go back to the example of Jesus as he spoke with this woman at the well. There's so much to learn from him. He showed us primarily just to be aware of the people and the opportunities he puts in front of you. As I mentioned last week,

this woman could have just been part of the landscape to him, but he saw her as a real person. He crossed all the fences that stood between them and took an interest in her. He showed that he cared about her. He asked her questions. On the surface, he had nothing in common with her, but he ignored that and found common ground. He spoke in ways she could understand. He didn't judge her, but he was willing to deal with the real issues in her life. He surfaced the need in her life by asking her to go get her husband when he knew she no longer had one. So while he didn't judge her, there was a salty realism about his interaction with her. He refused to get sidetracked but instead he stayed focused on the fundamental issue and that was who he is.

The WHY

What's our motivation for doing this? This story has revealed a number of things. It's revealed we do this because the harvest **is** ripe. Do you believe that? Do you believe God has worked in people's lives, preparing them to hear the good news about Jesus? Do you believe others have sown and maybe it's yours to reap? We tend to think people **don't** want to hear, and some don't, but many do. Jesus told us: *"Open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest."* He also told us that we do this because it's God's will; it's part of the work he's called each of us to do. Do you want to be in God's will? Jesus said, "While you guys were in line at McDonalds, I was talking to this dear woman. And put the Big Mac away because we have more work to do. This work feeds me in a way your food can't come close to. Look at all those Samaritans coming! Isn't that exciting?" We do this because the stakes are high. Jesus called it *"a crop for eternal life."* That's what's at stake—where people spend eternity. Will it be with God or without him? How important is that to you?

Penn Jillette is one half of Penn and Teller, a duo that's been headlining Vegas shows for years with comedy and the art of illusion. Penn has never been shy about his disbelief in God. He writes books about being an atheist. Yet in a video blog on YouTube, Penn shares a story about the time a gracious Christian businessman gave him a Bible as a gift. You'd think he would be offended by that, but Penn goes on to use the story as an opportunity to point out that Christians who don't evangelize must really hate people. Here's the direct quote from his video blog: "I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who do not proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, uh, well,

it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytize, [saying] "Just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself"—uh, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize them? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond the shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming to hit you, and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that." Jesus would agree with that. He would add it's even important enough to miss a meal. Could there be anything more important, anything more thrilling and satisfying than that?

Since today is St. Patrick's Day let me leave you with his story. Patrick wasn't born in Ireland, he was born in Roman Briton c. 390 A.D. When he was 16, he was kidnapped by pirates and enslaved for six years in Ireland, where he worked herding cattle. Although he'd grown up nominally Christian, this experience deepened his faith. He wrote: "But after I reached Ireland I used to pasture the flock each day and I used to pray many times a day. More and more did the love of God, and my fear of him and faith increase." He goes on to say how he was moved to pray night and day. It's clear he drank of those living waters.

One night a voice spoke to Patrick in a dream and told him it was time to go home. He escaped the next morning and negotiated passage to the mainland. The details of the next few years of Patrick's life are sketchy, but he eventually ended up in England, serving as a parish priest.

At the age of 48, he had another dream in which an angel appeared to him with letters from his former captors, begging him to return to them. He interpreted this dream as a call to take the gospel to Ireland and he appealed to his superiors to be sent on the mission. They agreed and Patrick arrived in Ireland around 432 A.D.. There he ministered for the next 28 years. Patrick gave his life to the people who had enslaved him until he died at 77 years of age. He saw thousands of people come to Christ. Between 30-40 of the 150 tribes had become predominantly Christian. He'd trained 1,000 pastors, planted 700 churches, and was the first noted person in history to take a strong public stand against slavery.

Patrick is just another example: living waters are meant to overflow! Are they overflowing from your life?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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