

Today we begin our new summer series.

There was a lot of positive feedback from last summer and this year we're doing something similar.

Various teachers from our Church will be unpacking the theme: "Trusting God With My \_\_\_\_."

We'll cover topics like: Trusting God With: my future, my salvation, my self-image, my hurts, and many others.

So today we begin Trusting God With My PAST. We're sort of getting caught up with where we are before we figure out where we're going.

Thinking of our past always reminds me of an amazing Story of Jesus that contains this strange quote.

/"Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?"

That story is from chapter 4 in John's gospel so let's take a look.

Now, before going on let's look at WHY John is telling up this story.

/John 20:30-31

30 The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

/John 4:1-4

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He had to go through Samaria on the way.

/ MAP

So here's the landscape at the time of Jesus. Judea is here containing a lot of the places we read about on the Old Testament including Jerusalem. North of that is Samaria. This was part of the land originally settled by Israel but after King Solomon the kingdom

was divided between north and south and that led to centuries of civil war. Their religious beliefs and practices also became very different. In Judea they had everything we think of as the Old Testament in their Bible. But in Samaria they only kept the 5 books of Moses; the law. They did not accept the books of the prophets or the histories.

North of Samaria is Galilee including the town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Now the Jewish temple was in Jerusalem so practicing Jews in Galilee, including Jesus' family would travel there several times a year. They could take another route around Samaria but it would add a day or two to their travels.

/John 4:1-4

So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He had to go through Samaria on the way.

/John 4:5-7

Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water.

This is how the woman is introduced to us. Not a lot of information but it leaves room for some general assumptions.

We're told that the women tried to have their water gathering done early in the day. The water would be cooler and carrying would be easier if it was done before the heat of the day.

John tells us it was 'about noontime'. So this seems unusual.

Another thing we're told is that gathering water was an important social activity for the women. A lot of their very hard work was inside the courtyard and house. The walk to the well, the drawing of water, the walk back was their best chance to chat, share stories, support each other.

John tells us 'a Samaritan woman came to draw water'. So this seems unusual.

We don't want to make assumptions about this woman.

But remember two important things:

1) John has more information than he can put on paper so every little

detail is there for a reason.  
2) This story is really not Jesus.

And so we notice what Jesus probably noticed:  
This woman came to the well when the other women were not there. And none of the other women came with her when she went to gather water.

/John 4:7-9

And Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

I like her. She doesn't cover her face and run away. She doesn't ignore him. He's breaking social custom and she calls him on it.

I like Jesus too. He doesn't get mad and teach her her place. He doesn't strengthen his request for water. There's more going on here. But not wanting to be confrontational he actually goes a little passive aggressive on her.

/John 4:10

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

We considered how the woman could have been viewed in this situation. How could Jesus have been viewed?

- a single middle-aged man
- not from around here
- hanging out at the well, the normal domain of women
- using phrases like; the gift God has for you, the guy you are speaking to, I would give you living water.

This is sacred text. We know Jesus is speaking. But ladies if you're ever going to the well for water and a single man who's not from around here approaches you and starts talking about a gift from God, the guy talking to you, giving you living water, I recommend you turn around and go home. The kids can go thirsty one night.

And this woman was likely considering something like that too. But she's intrigued by his words. Her day, and probably her life has not turned out how she would have planned but she hasn't given up, she's not reduced to whining and complaining. She says 'tell me more'.

/John 4:11-14

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

They had 2 kinds of water. Still and Living. Still water was in large jars or sisterns. It sat there, room temperature, attracting bugs. Living water was a stream or a spring, bubbling, moving, fresh, living.

/John 4:15 "Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

/John 4:16 "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

/John 4:17 "I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

/John 4:17-18. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband— for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

John is an amazing writer. He tells us what we need to know. And he does NOT tell us what we do NOT need to know.

There's no question this woman has had a traumatic past. But what ha actually happened? We cannot say.

/-five husbands  
-not married to the man you're  
living with  
A GREAT SINNER?

This woman is often presented as a great sinner – sort of like the woman caught in adultery. In her case Jesus used the law to protect her but he was very gentle. He's also gentle with this woman. She's jumped from husband to husband and finally has skipped the

wedding and now she's just living with a guy.  
I think the reason we lean to this interpretation is that we get to see Jesus as a great forgiver, which he is.

But if that is her story there are some missing pieces.

Seeing her as a greater sinner would make sense if she was a daytime stop opera. But Samaria is far from Hollywood.

/-five husbands  
-not married to the man you're  
  living with  
    A GREAT SINNER?  
    A SAD VICTIM?

It's possible that she is a great victim. For now thing remember that girls were married off shortly after they were able to become mothers. 12-14 would be a normal marrying age. The man often had to be able to be able to support a family so was usually between 20 and 30. The girls doesn't have a lot of authority in these marriages. And in the case of divorce it can only be initiated by the husband. It's not possible to see her as a gold digger, marrying men for their money and then divorcing them. In fact at times divorce could be granted if her husband found anything 'displeasing' in her. And then he'd look for someone else. And at times these men were simply exchanging wives. This is the situation when Jesus is teaching on divorce and he adds a moral dynamic to this abuse of the law.

And this guy she's living with? It's not like they shackled up in an apartment over the blowing alley. No one could just move in to its, find a job and get an apartment. Every business was a family business and there was no safe and acceptable work for a single woman. So someone has given her a place to live. Under what conditions we do not know. A sad victim.

But there's even a third possibility that's just a plausible. She may have simply had a tragic life.

/-five husbands  
-not married to the man you're  
  living with  
    A GREAT SINNER?  
    A SAD VICTIM?  
    A TRAGIC LIFE?

She's had five husbands. It's possible the she's been a widow five

times. Again husbands were generally older and would often leave widows. If her husband didn't leave her a large sum of money or if there weren't enough kids to take care of her remarrying would be very common.

But a widow five times? The Romans were brutal to anyone they thought was a rebel. Disease, accidents. It's possible. And a happy life would see her in her own home surrounded by her grandchildren into her final years. But not her. Her five marriages have NOT left her with enough to live on so some relative, a brother, a cousin, an uncle, has taken her in. Rather than a matriarch she just is a guest.

A TRAGIC LIFE? Maybe this little of ritual of getting water alone is her only peace – the only time she's not reminded of all that other people have.

Jesus' words, the words John chooses to tell us leave the possibilities wide open. And there's a beauty in that.

It means this woman's story – belongs to each of us.

And the key is that however she got to this moment – there is no mention of who is to blame.

Whichever road brought her here, sin was the driving force.

Some of us have sins we hope no one ever knows about. Some of us have been abused in ways that make us think we could never feel clean. Some of us have been a series of tragic events and we're not sure how much more we can take.

And Jesus stands before us all.

Remember this isn't even a story about the woman. It's a story about Jesus – and ME – YOU – whoever is reading. John's goal in this story is to bring Jesus and the reader together.

This is our story.

/John 4:16 “Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

He points directly at the greatest pain in her life, regardless of how she got there.

Now he's got a lot of options:

'What's this got to do with him. Let him get his own water.  
Don't change the subject.'

But she doesn't hide.

/John 4:17 "I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus says: "I know and I know even more about your pain than you're telling me."

The conversation carries on and on. What they talk about is interesting but it's not what we're looking at here this morning.

The point is, they kept talking.

From Jesus there's no shaming, no rubbing it in, no disgust. Jesus has no time for that.

A few weeks ago it was the 75th anniversary of D-Day. Soldiers from Canada, Great Britain and the United States hit the shores of France. Can you imagine how silly it would have been if, as the soldiers made their way through France they made the people feel bad.

"We shouldn't have to do this. You sure made a mess by letting these guys take over. You should be ashamed."

Jesus did not come to make sinners feel bad. He came to save them.

And let me be clear: even if this woman's story has elements of abuse or tragedy, sin is always a key element of our past.  
Jesus died because of sin.  
Sin is part of all of our past.

Remember Paul, Saint Paul, Saul of Tarsus?  
A pretty good guy. He was martyred, more than once.  
He wrote at least 13 books of the New Testament and influenced other books.

This is what Peter thought of Paul:

/2 Peter 3:15-16

And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This

is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him— speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.

And this is how Paul saw himself and his own contributions to church:

/1 Timothy 1:15–16

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.

In his own words his greatest contribution was to be an example of a forgiven sinner. An example of God's mercy.  
This is our role in the church. This is the role of the church in the world.

Historians and theologians could go on for years discussing Paul's value to the Church and western civilization.

What does Paul think his true value is?

/But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners.

The only way Paul could experience the full mercy of God is by FIRST being confronted about all of his sin, all of his past. If he was still making excuses or in denial I don't think he could have seen himself as the worst of sinners fully forgiven.

He was so aware of what God had forgiven him, he had no value in shaming others, making others feel bad.

Let's look at the quote again.

/“Christ Jesus came into the world to SHAME sinners.”



What a terrible misuse of the name and Gospel of Jesus.

/“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

Isaiah had an interesting description of sinners.

/Isaiah 53:6

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

Sheep.

Not ravenous wolves tearing each other apart. Not sharks sneaking up on our prey. Not boas strangling our enemies. Sheep. Sheep aren't smart enough to do any of that. Sheep are dumb. That's all.

"Oh, look. There's some grass. I like grass. I'm going to eat that grass. Oh, look. There's some grass over there. I like grass. I'm going to go eat that grass. Oh, look. There's some grass on that hill. I like grass. I'm going to eat that grass." Then we finally look up and think, "Where am I and how did I get here? Oh, look. There's some grass. I like grass. I'm going to eat that grass."

"Well I'm a human and I like to do stuff so I'll just keep doing stuff. Here's some good stuff. I'll do that. Here's some bad. Well, maybe just a little." And every now and then we look up and say, "What is the meaning of life? Oh look, there's a mall. I can go there and watch youtube."

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Most of it is not deliberate rebellion. It's not our fist in the face of God. It's not a program designed to ruin humanity.

It's just wandering aimlessly.

And that's the sin that was laid on Jesus.

In his letter to the Romans, Pauls gives another view of sin.

/Romans 3:23

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Let's break it into 2 parts.

/For everyone has sinned

Pretty clear. And there's no mention of levels of sin. There's no room for anyone to think, "Jesus is so busy forgiving murderers and slav traders, he won't even notice my little slip-ups."

Everyone has sinned.

Okay, part two.

/We all fall short of God's glorious standard.

So let's imagine for the sake of argument, a human, other than Jesus, who lives a sinless life, not one act of sin. Not one slip up. Even a human who had never committed an act of sin would be unworthy to enter the presence of God without serious protection.

None of us reflects the beauty and holiness of God the way we're meant to. We all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Our acts of sin, our brokenness, our pain, our tragedy is all simply evidence of a sin nature deep within us AND THAT'S what JESUS came to save us from.

So when Jesus tells this woman he knows all about her past she's okay with it.

SHE DID NOT FEEL THREATENED BY THIS STRANGER KNOWING HER PAST.

Jesus has this amazing quality of not making sinners feel uncomfortable.

In fact this woman wants to have a theological discussion.

/John 4:19-20

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

And they have an interesting discussion but we won't take the time to go into it.

This woman with a questionable reputation is having a deep theological discussion with the greatest Jewish scholar of all time, the greatest human mind of all time, because she wouldn't walk away when it got a little uncomfortable. I love that.

And then the moment is ruined, the boys come back.

/John 4:27

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?"

/John 4:28-30

The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

/John 4:28-30

"Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!

What an interesting way to introduce people to Jesus.

"Do you know Jesus? He knows everything I ever did – and I'm okay with that."

It is so liberating to open up our entire past to Jesus and say, "You are Lord of it all. My sin, my pain, my tragedy. I give it all to you."

Thomas Watson was a Puritan writer who once said:

/“Christ went more willingly to the cross than we do to the throne of grace.”

– Thomas Watson

An interesting thought. I can identify with it.

It seems at times that Jesus was more willing to go to the cross for me – than I am willing to confess my sin to him.

We each have a past. We each have to deal with it. God has ONE desire in dealing with our past: preparing us for the future.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not against humans. I like humans. I like being a human. Humans have done wonderful things.

But all of those wonderful things were part of our 'wandering our own paths.' Can you imagine then, what amazingly wonderful things we will accomplish when the victory of Jesus is fully applied and we are fully saved from the influence of sin, from fear and shame and doubt.

Whatever we like about being human now, it will be nothing compared to being the humans in future kingdom.

But scripture is abundantly clear.

There is only one way to prepare for that future: By trusting the Lord of our past, by opening all the doors and windows and cupboards and closets and accepting God's forgiveness for it all. Freedom.

But if we cannot trust God with our past then we can never leave it behind. We can never know it was dealt with at the cross.

If we cannot trust God with our past, then how can He trust us with the future.