

## “Called and Sent”

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Well, I want to start off this morning by taking you back about a year and a half ago to my very first day of college. It was the fall of 2021, and I was super excited to walk into my very first theology class. I was a happy-go-lucky freshman, didn't really know what to expect. I was just ready to get in there and begin the journey of learning about God.

But what I didn't realize is that I had just walked into a room full of seniors who were going to be graduating at the end of the year. The professor walked in, and we started class. (Great job registering for this class and not the intro class). And suddenly I had absolutely no idea what we were talking about. Like, the professor was talking about something called hermeneutics and eschatology and ecclesiology. We had one of the students off to my right reciting the Greek alphabet and another explaining events in church history like they happened yesterday. All the other students would be talking to each other since they had known each other for years now, and then there was me frantically trying to take notes over whatever in the world they were saying. At one point, the professor asked about some passage out of Habakkuk, and here I was just trying to figure out how to SPELL Habakkuk... two K's in the middle, one K at the end, thank you very much. So, to put it simply, I have never felt more out of place in my entire life. I felt like I was the outcast. It was really making me question whether I was the right kind of person for this.

In our gospel reading for today, we hear a long, but usually pretty familiar story of the woman at the well. Essentially, a Samaritan woman is drawing water at a well when Jesus comes along and asks her for a drink. She was very surprised by this question because she was considered an outcast. Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other, and no Jew would ever want to be seen speaking with a Samaritan, let alone asking for ANYTHING from one. She was also a woman. She also had a past that made her have a less than favorable reputation. This woman, who goes unnamed throughout the story, would have been the last person people would have expected Jesus to speak to. When the disciples returned, the passage says that they were even surprised to find him talking to the woman. In their culture, Jesus would have been seen as completely dominant over her: he was a Jew, a man, and a rabbi. But even though Jesus would have been seen by society as the dominant person, he showed that he had a need for her by asking her for help. He showed her that she had value and purpose just by acknowledging her. Just THAT simple gesture would have honestly been radical in those times. And while Jesus shows his humanity and humility in this passage by needing a drink of water after spending time in the hot sun all day just like we would, this woman in the story was thirsting for something much more. She was seeking fulfillment and purpose, but she was not finding it in the things of this world. She continued to come up dry time and time again. It was like she was wandering in the desert for hours, searching for water with no luck. Then, Jesus comes along, and he speaks of a new kind of water in which she will never be thirsty again. He can bring newness out of brokenness. He brings us restoration. Jesus is our living water.

Our hope and fulfillment lie in Christ's Spirit flowing within us. In our first Bible reading from Exodus for today, we heard about how the Israelites were thirsty in the desert after being set free from Egypt. And God provided for them. In the same way, God STILL provides for us. We have all been in our own desert, searching for meaning. Searching for answers. Searching for hope. We all face hard times and struggles. We are all sinful, and we all doubt God from time to time. But God still provides for us now just like he provided water for his people then. We have been given the gift of Jesus Christ, our living water in which we will never thirst again. Those who are in Jesus Christ find new life and purpose. God, in his mercy, sent Jesus to be that water that nourishes us and fulfills us and gives life new meaning. This is the good news of the gospel that Jesus declares to the Samaritan woman.

In fact, this conversation with the Samaritan woman is the longest recorded conversation that Jesus has with anyone. And it's with someone who was an outsider. Someone who lived the wrong life. Someone from the wrong place. Someone who was a woman. Someone who goes unnamed. Yet, Jesus seeks her out. She does not go to Jesus herself, and she even questions Jesus when he speaks to her. But Jesus calls HER toward HIM. Jesus calls us as his children despite our sinfulness, despite our flaws, despite our imperfections. Our second

reading from Romans today says that God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, but Jesus died for sinners. Jesus saw past her imperfections. He saw past her reputation, her past, her sinfulness. He saw her heart. Jesus saw her as someone with a genuine heart seeking transformation from this living water, from this gift he provided. God will seek us out in his love and mercy. It doesn't matter who you or others think you are or what you have done in your past. God is seeking to have a relationship with every one of us. He calls us and meets us where we are. His holy spirit fills our hearts so that we can live for Him and **proclaim** his joyous message.

Because while this is a momentous, powerful moment in the reading that tells of Jesus as our living water and hope, it is not where the story ends. The woman goes out and spreads this good news to those around her by proclaiming... Jesus told her everything she ever did. This was her testimony to others. That's it. That's all we are told. Her witness, or testimony about Jesus, to others was literally "He told me everything I ever did." I mean, this isn't like she was on the verge of writing the Apostle's Creed or a gospel book or something to spread God's word. Also, wasn't her life and her past the very thing that seemed to make her an outcast? Now, she's using that as her testimony for why Jesus is the savior of the world? It just seems like no one would listen to someone like her proclaiming something like this. She seems like a very unlikely person to be a witness for God. How could someone like her spread the gospel?

Yet, this passage shows us that anyone can spread the gospel. Anyone can proclaim the good news of God's mercy and forgiveness. God can use anyone for his purposes, and He can work all things and situations for good. Her past and her reputation and status made her an outsider and stranger. It made her isolated and thirsty for something more. But all of this becomes the very thing she uses to spread the gospel. It is the door to a new beginning in Jesus Christ, it is the door to her witness.

The last thing the people in the passage say after the Samaritan woman ran into town to tell them about Jesus was "we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." And was her proclamation perfect? Did she have absolutely everything correct and down to a tee and well thought-out? Did she understand everything and know how to answer every question? Did she even have all her own questions answered? No! But it didn't matter. People heard her. People heard the good news. They heard about Jesus and believed.

As Christians, we are called to spread the good news of the gospel and proclaim Jesus as our living water. All of us! But that can sometimes seem hard. Many times, we may feel inadequate, like we don't know enough. We feel like it is a specialized call and can't be for someone like me. "Someone else can do it, right?! They'll do it!" We feel that we do not know the gospel well enough to explain it to people or defend it. We fear speaking and saying the wrong thing. We lack confidence, so even though we may really want to talk about and share our faith with others, we fear looking foolish or stupid or unfaithful. We may even fear rejection. And, if you have ever felt any of this, you are certainly not alone. Like I said in the beginning, I felt this way in my first Theology class, but I also learned in that same class that 22% of Christians do not share their faith or share the gospel with those around them because of this fear of not knowing enough. 10% of Christians say they feel unequipped, so they lack confidence in themselves and think they'll say something wrong. 8% fear rejection. So, this is certainly not an uncommon feeling.

But we are all called to spread the gospel. Mark 16:15: "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." The list of these could go on and on and on. And this story of the Samaritan Woman shows us that our proclamation doesn't have to be perfect. God does not expect perfection! He doesn't compare us to others just like I was comparing myself to other students in my class. Comparing ourselves to others will keep us from what God is calling us to do. Because the truth is, we are flawed, and we do have these weaknesses. This is why we trust in God and his guidance. Because all the fruit we produce from our proclamation is a result of God's work, not our own. 2 Corinthians 12:9: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast even more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." His power is perfect even in our weaknesses.

We can trust that God will guide us, and the Holy Spirit will fill us and enable us to do this kingdom building work.

And, through this story of the Samaritan woman, we see that God can use the most unlikely people to accomplish his will. We can see this in several other parts of the Bible as well. David was a shepherd boy, the youngest in his family, and God made him king of Israel. It was from his line that Jesus came, and he was called a man after God's own heart. God used Moses to lead the Israelites to freedom even though he was described as slow of speech with a fear of being a leader. Peter described himself as a sinful man and Matthew was a tax collector, but they dropped everything to follow Jesus and become two of his 12 disciples. Paul was a PERSECUTOR of Christians and despised them, and yet, God worked in his heart and made him an apostle who wrote much of the New Testament. I could make this sermon go on all day just by talking about all these people who were unlikely leaders being used in big ways for God's mission.

Romans 12 says, which Paul wrote by the way: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." We are all given different gifts by the Holy Spirit to fulfill this calling to go out into the world declaring Jesus Christ as our Lord. This isn't just for preaching or being a pastor. When I look at this congregation, I see people with the gift of teaching, and will be called to share God's word by teaching others. I see people gifted with youth and working with them. I see people who show compassion and generosity towards others, being light in the world by reflecting God's love to those around them. I see natural leaders, technicians, and businesspeople with diligence and work ethic to make our church run. I see people devoted to prayer and worship, who pray for everyone on our prayer list each week and never miss a Sunday morning service. All these gifts can be used to spread God's word to the world, even if you believe you are unqualified. Jesus is our qualifier! Maybe you are being called to a job in ministry, or maybe you are being called to volunteer as a Sunday School teacher or service worker. Maybe you are being called to lead music or be involved in choir, or maybe you are called to share the gospel with a coworker, friend, or family member who simply needs to hear of this living water and life found in Jesus Christ. Just like the Samaritan woman, spreading God's word does not need to be done in some specific or special way, and we don't need to always have the right and perfect words to say. People will see our testimony by our love for God and each other as we build his kingdom.

As 1 Peter says, we "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of the darkness into his marvelous light." We have been called out of the darkness and into God's light, and we have been called and given the ability to share this light to others and proclaim our Lord. We are all priests together in God's family because Jesus has restored our relationship to God, and every one of us in Christ has this role of making God known through the work of the holy spirit as our guide.

God will make himself known and his word and truth will prevail. It's easy to feel like we are not qualified or don't know enough to live up to this calling to share the gospel just like I felt I was inadequate in class that day. But the Holy Spirit is working in our lives, and as he calls us into his family as his own, he sends us out to invite others into this community and mission we share in Christ. No one is an outcast in this family. Jesus calls the unlikely, he calls the outcasts, he calls the rejected. We are called, and we are sent. I may not know everything, and I will not say everything perfectly, but I can say that God has given a promise to each and every one of you. So here I go: You are perfectly made and chosen by God. Jesus died for you and saved you and made you into a new creation. You are loved unconditionally and saved to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our savior, redeemer, hope, and living water. Amen.