

Thirsty for More

1. Warm up: Jeff began Sunday's sermon with a story about the passion and fanaticism of Pacer and Thunder fans. How do you feel about how the Pacers did in the NBA Finals? Are you a fan? If not, what's something you are a big fan of?
2. The relatively harmless tribalism of sports fans illustrates on a small scale a far more deadly problem we face on a global scale. In our fallen state, we humans are, by nature, tribal. My people versus your people. It starts with distrust, then moves to fear, then often to hatred. It's a primal impulse that goes all the way back to ancient times when a neighboring tribe might try to take what's yours or even kill you. Jeff told a story about the power of racism in the small town where he grew up. When have you witnessed, participated in, or been a victim of racism or some other form of tribalism? How did that experience make you feel?
3. In this week's Gospel story, Jesus walked right into a maelstrom of racial tension that existed between Jews and Samaritans. Several centuries earlier, the Assyrian Empire invaded Israel, captured the city of Samaria, deported many Jews, and imported many foreigners. The imported foreigners and remaining Jews living around Samaria intermarried and produced a new race called Samaritans. During the time of Jesus, Samaritans were the predominant population in the middle of Israel, while Jews predominated in the north and south. The hatred between them ran so deep, Jews burned the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. They also refused to touch anything Samaritan's touched, especially vessels for eating and drinking. When traveling from south to north, many Jews refused to pass through Samaria, instead taking the long way around. But not Jesus! He chose to travel through Samaria. Read John 4:3-39, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Why do you think Jesus chose to travel through Samaria? And what should we learn the choice he made?
 - b. How do you think the Samaritan woman felt when Jesus, a Jew, asked for a drink from her drinking vessel? What did his request communicate about his attitude toward people of her race? How do you think that impacted her?
4. Jesus' actions not only challenged deeply ingrained racial prejudices between Jews and Samaritans, but also deeply ingrained gender prejudices. In first century Jewish culture, men weren't supposed to speak to women in public, especially women they didn't know. A famous rabbinic text from the time of Jesus put it this way, "Speak not much with a woman. . . . For as the wise men say, 'He who speaks much with a woman draws down misfortune on himself, neglects the words of the law, and finally earns hell!'"
 - a. What feeds that way of thinking about women? Where does it come from?
 - b. Scholars say that all forms of prejudice and discrimination are "intersectional," meaning that they all arise from the same mindset – a mindset rooted in primal

fear of those who are different and a fear of scarcity. Do you buy that? Why or why not?

- c. What happens if we only fight one form of prejudice, but ignore others?
 - d. Why are so many Christians so tribal?
 - e. As this week's Gospel story illustrates, Jesus was adamantly anti-tribal. To him people were people and anything that divides us must be torn down. What are some practical things we, like Jesus, can do to seek to heal tribalism?
5. The conversation that Jesus ended up having with the Samaritan woman didn't focus on race or gender, but instead offered her (and us) insight into a completely different human problem, i.e., the problem of our thirsty souls. In her thirst to find something that would satisfy her soul, the Samaritan woman had run through five different spousal relationships and was working on her sixth.
- a. From time-to-time, we're all tempted to try to quench the thirst within us with all kinds of things (some of them wonderful, some not) that ultimately can't deliver – things like relationships, children, sex, food, drink, career, popularity, prosperity, travel and adventure, etc., etc. What's the thing that you are (or have been) most tempted to turn to (other than God) in search of inner satisfaction?
 - b. When her conversation with Jesus started to get real, the Samaritan woman tried to change the subject by turning it into a theological debate about the best place to worship. Look at Jesus' reply in verses 21-24. What do you understand him to be trying to say to the woman? Explain his message here into your own words.
 - c. Jeff said that Jesus was inviting the Samaritan woman to “discover religion, not as doctrine, but as relationship with God.” What's the difference, and why is the distinction so important?
 - d. In his autobiography, Alec Guinness describes a blissful spiritual experience that awakened him to the beauty of living in the presence of God. When have you experienced the presence of God in a deeply beautiful way? What happened? What did God's presence feel like?
 - e. Where are you in the process of building a deep personal relationship with God? Would you say you're just starting, or midway, or well along the way and deeply into it? What are some practical things we can do to keep growing the depth of our relationship with God?

John 4:3-39, selected verses

³ When Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee, ⁴ he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said, "Give me a drink." ⁹ She said, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

¹³ Everyone who drinks of Jacob's well will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty."

¹⁶ Jesus said, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered, "I have no husband." Jesus said, "You're right in saying, 'I have no husband,' ¹⁸ for you've had five husbands, and the one you have now isn't your husband." ¹⁹ The woman said, "Sir, I see that you're a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²³ The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming and he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" ³⁹ And many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony.