



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### January 30, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

#### John 4:1-42 The Woman at the Well

A woman is carrying a stack of papers, turns the corner and bumps into someone coming the other direction. The papers scatter, the two people—full of apologies (or maybe frustration) start to pick up the papers, but then lock eyes. There is a brief pause and then conversation begins.

Or maybe this: Two people on a busy street in New York are hailing a cab. A taxi stops, and both reach for the door at the same time, or maybe each gets into the car from opposite sides and they find each other sitting next to each other. They argue for a moment about who's cab it is, but then decide to share it and begin a conversation.

If you're watching either of these scenes in a movie, you know what to expect. This is the beginning of the love interest. Some call it the "Meet-Cute." It has been a trope in romantic comedies for decades. From Gene Kelly jumping into Debbie Reynolds' car in *Singing in the Rain* to Tom Hanks bumping into Meg Ryan in her bookstore in *You've Got Mail*, it is the moment we all recognize. The meet-cute is when the romance begins. Even if it gets off on the wrong foot (which it usually does), we know that this is how the story is told.

That is why the movie *Frozen* was so powerful. (Spoiler Alerts ahead) This Disney classic released in 2013 was a runaway hit in large part because it overturned the typical rom-com tropes. The meet-cute between Anna and Hans follows all the patterns at first (including a maddeningly catchy duet, "Love is an Open Door"). In the end though, it turns out that the love that triumphs in *Frozen* is not the love between Anna and Hans, but the love between Anna and her sister Elsa. The movie captured the hearts of so many (including this Dad of two daughters) because it took the trope and reversed it.

Jesus and the Woman at the Well is a story much like *Frozen*. It takes a common trope—a story all of the original hearers would have understood, and flips it. The rom-com trope is reversed as a way to make a point about Jesus and not the woman, but about the true object of the affection – the Samaritan people.

Two things you must understand going into this story to truly grasp its power: 1. Samaritans were the long-time violent enemies of the Jewish people. The nations of Samaria and Judea both traced their roots back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The split began with the division of the Kingdom after the death of Solomon. It grew deeper after the Northern Kingdom and then the Southern Kingdom were conquered by the great neighboring empires. It was worsened over disputes over how to rebuild after exile was over. By the time of Jesus, Samaritans and Judeans hated each other. Today's story begins "Jesus had to go through Samaria." No he didn't. Jews traveling from Jeru-

slalem to Galilee never went through Samaria. They instead chose to go the long way around because going through Samaria was dangerous.

2. In ancient stories, a man and a woman meeting at a well meant one thing was coming: a betrothal. For the hearers of this ancient story, Jesus and the woman at the well may as well have been Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Jacob met his future wife Rachel at a well. This pairing, in fact, is the only time in the Bible that we are told that a married couple feels "love" toward each other. Moses met his future wife Zipporah at the well. Attendants for Isaac met his future wife at the well.

Each time the pattern was clear. Men meets woman at well. Woman goes home to tell her family. Family goes to man and invites him over for hospitality. Man and woman are betrothed. Notice how many of these steps are paralleled in John's story. Jesus meets the woman. She goes home to talk to the people. They invite Jesus back to their home (which in itself is a miracle).

In the end, it is not Jesus and the woman who are betrothed. Like *Frozen*, the trope is upset. Instead of being about Anna and Hans, the love is about Anna and Elsa. In John, the story is not about Jesus and the woman, it is about the other betrothal that happens—between Jesus and the Samaritans. That's right—the hated, reviled Samaritans. The love of Jesus overcomes generations of hatred and violence.

The verse could have read, "For God so loved the world that Jesus had to go through Samaria." Jesus had to go to there because God loves the world, and the world needed mending. The love had to be restored, and it all starts with a meet-cute between Jesus and a woman at the well.



Jesus and the Samaritan woman, 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Illuminated manuscript from the *Jruchi Gospels II*, National Center of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Georgia.