

Find Great Joy in Inviting Everyone

Scripture

John 4:5-30, 39-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "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 her, "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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water 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 to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we

believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

Sermon

Today I am continuing my six-part sermon series which has been based around Varnell's new vision which was adopted last year. Let's say the vision again together:

“We will be an anchor in the community that finds great joy in inviting everyone to be disciples of Jesus Christ with us.”

In my first sermon, I talked about the importance of having a vision for Christians individually and especially as a community of faith to help us understand where we feel like God is calling us to use the spiritual gifts He has given us. Last week I talked about the first part of the vision where we say Varnell “will be an anchor in the community.”

If for some reason you missed either of those worship services, I would like to encourage you to go to our church's website and either read what I preached or you can watch the videos of the sermons. If you go to the web address that is printed in the bulletin, there is a section on the website dedicated for my sermons. It is really easy to navigate and after a few simple clicks with the mouse, you can be reading or watching those two sermons. If you missed any of these sermons, I would encourage you to watch or read them, because knowing where this church is headed in the future is important if you are going to be a part of God's work here.

Today I am going to be preaching about the next part of Varnell's vision statement “We will...[find] great joy in inviting everyone.”

When we talk about inviting people to church, what is the one theological word that comes to most life-long Christians minds? Evangelism, isn't it? When we think about inviting people to know Christ, the word evangelism comes to many peoples' minds. It is one of the main tasks that every Christian is called to do.

The funny thing is most Christian do not seem to like or even want to think about evangelism. For whatever reason, people do not like to do what they think of as evangelism. Everyone wants someone else to handle the evangelism ministries in our churches. Most people definitely do not seem to find “joy” in it. I can tell you from experience, the evangelism leadership position that are on many churches' administrative boards is always one of the hardest positions to fill during the nomination process that is done every year in the United Methodist Church.

I am not sure why we do not like that word. Maybe we do not like the word because we have this impression that evangelists are these great and powerful and knowledgeable and spiritual people, who stand up in front of people and talk about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Most of us do not see ourselves like that. Most people do not feel they have the training or the knowledge to do evangelism. And, so many people just say, “That's what we pay the preachers or church staff to do! Let them do it.”

Maybe we do not like this word evangelism because when we hear it, we are afraid that someone is going to make us work at something that is awkward and maybe embarrassing. Think about it

for a minute. In the past, what churches did that was called evangelism, was strange and odd to us. It made us feel uncomfortable. Most of us do not like going around knocking on the doors of the homes of strangers. Most of us do not like giving out brochures or tracts or pamphlets to people we do not know. In reality, those are some of the least effective ways to do evangelism.

Maybe we do not like the word because recently it has been hijacked by politicians and has some political connotations to it that some people just do not agree with.

Whatever the case, most Christians kind of cringe when they hear the word evangelism. Maybe we ought to start using another word for it from this point forward. What if we just started using the word that is in our vision statement: invite. We might be fearful of the word evangelism, but most people do not have the same feeling about the word invite.

How many of you like to go to parties? How many of you like to attend weddings and special dinners? How many of you like to go to special events? How many of you like to host these special occasions from time to time? My guess is we all do, don't we?

What is the one thing that most parties have in common? Usually, there is an invitation that comes with a party. Whether it is by word of mouth or a note in a bulletin or a post on a website or a card sent through the mail, most parties have some kind of invitation for them.

And when you host a party and send out some kind of invitation, do you say to yourself, "I am so upset that I have to host this party. I really do not want to invite people to it." Of course not, you are happy to send out those invitations because you want people to celebrate with you. You find joy in doing so.

And we all know how to invite people to do something or go somewhere. You do not have to be this great and powerful person to offer an invitation. You do not have to have an abundance or knowledge or be a spiritual giant. You do not have to be a perfect person or have an outgoing personality. It is rather easy to invite someone to do something, even people you do not really know. Really anyone can do it and it should be the same for inviting people to church.

In our text from John today, we can see maybe the first person to invite others to come and see Jesus, to hear what he had to say.

Jesus had just been to Jerusalem for the Passover, and we find him now traveling with his disciples, going back to Galilee. This is a map of the area I am talking about. Jerusalem is down here in the red area and Galilee is up in this blue area. Between these two areas is another area called Samaria.

Because of their history, many of the Jews despised the Samaritans. This hatred came about because during the Exile, the Jews in Samaria who were not taken into exile by the Assyrians eventually started intermarrying with foreigners who were transplanted by the Assyrians. The devout Jews felt these Samaritan Jews had betrayed their people and nation by doing this, and saw them as "unclean". And because there were Jewish ceremonial laws which described not only certain people as ceremonially unclean, but also anything they touched, the Jews just avoided going anywhere near Samaria or near a Samaritan so they would not possibly become unclean themselves.

Because of this prejudice towards the Samaritans, many of the strict Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee would actually take a route around Samaria, through Perea, which is east of the Jordan River. They would take this longer route even though that route would take more time and was about a trek of 110 miles. But for those who were trying to make the best time, it was much faster to go through Samaria to get to Galilee, which ended up being about only about a 75 mile trip, which cut off about two days travel. To get at how really strong this prejudice was towards the Samaritans, how strongly would you feel about something that would make you want to walk another 35 miles or a minimum of adding two or three days to your journey? For whatever reason, Jesus and his disciples chose to take this more direct route on this trip.

Our scripture says by the time Jesus arrived in Sychar, he was tired. And why wouldn't he be? The walk between Jerusalem and Sychar was about 35 miles and probably took he and his disciples two or three days to walk. So, when they arrive at Jacob's well, Jesus waited their while his disciples went to find food.

After his disciples left, a Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water and Jesus begins to start a conversation with her by asking for a drink of water from her water jar. This kind or startled the woman, because first, she recognized Jesus as a Jew and most Jews would not even speak to a Samaritan. Secondly, he was a Jewish male who would not usually speak to a woman who was a stranger. And thirdly, because he asked for a drink of water from her container, which was something a Jew would never do of a Samaritan. She was startled because she understood the prejudices of the Jews of Jesus' time, so she was baffled why Jesus would be talking to her and asking her what he did. This woman knew no respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did.

Jesus soon reveals that water was not what he really wanted. He was seeking an opening to tell his message, and he begins by talking about the water of life. He offers to give her living water, the water of eternal life. Jesus proceeds to tell this woman what he knows about her and during the conversation she lets him know she knows the prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. The Samaritan people believed in the coming of "the Prophet" predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), whom they called "the Restorer." The Samaritans may have also heard of the coming Messiah from John the Baptist who had been baptizing in the northern part of Samaria. After her comment about the Messiah, Jesus reveals to her that he is this person. This is kind of shocking, because this was something Jesus had not been willing to say to Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council when he was in Jerusalem for Passover.

The disciples eventually return, and they too are surprised that Jesus is speaking with this Samaritan woman. The sudden arrival of the disciples interrupted the conversation between Jesus and the woman, and it is interesting that Jesus seems to make no effort to continue the exchange. He had placed himself before the woman as the one she was expecting, the Messiah. What the woman would have said in response to Jesus' revelation is unknown. But what she did is clear. She left her water jar at the well and immediately went and told her neighbors that she had just encountered a unique and wonderful person whom they should also meet. She knew very little about Jesus, but she had heard what he had told her, and his message touched her. The news she shared about the stranger at the well raised great curiosity among the townspeople who then came out to see him.

After they met Jesus, many of the townspeople came to understand him as the “Savior of the world” and all because of what this woman had to say about her encounter with Jesus and her invitation to see him. It was not because this Samaritan woman was a biblical scholar and quoted every scripture she knew. She was not a close friend of Jesus and did not know every detail of what he was teaching. She was not a leader in the community who people looked up to and followed. She even did not point out the people's needs and tell them Jesus could help them. She simply shared her encounter with Jesus and invited the people to come and see him.

I think this biblical story has a lot to say about our vision statement's words “We will...[find] great joy in inviting everyone.”

First and foremost, we need to understand that the gospel message is for every person, no matter his or her race, social position, political opinion, religious orientation, or past sins. The woman Jesus met at the well was a Samaritan, who most Jewish people did not think were worthy of God. They were prejudice against them and did not want to have anything to do with them, especially talk with God about them. That's strike one.

The woman was also living in sin. She had had five husbands and was currently living with another man who was not her husband. She was living in adultery. The Jews felt people living in sin were not to be anywhere near anything sacred because they might make it or them unclean. That is strike two.

So, this woman had two strikes against her, when one strike was enough for most devout Jews to call her “out.”

But as he often did, Jesus showed God's love, grace, and mercy toward this woman. Jesus showed the gospel is open for everyone and should be available to all at any time and in any place. What this shows us is we must also be prepared to deal with those who may be accustomed to being ill-treated and who are not sure of our motives. We can see that Jesus crossed all barriers to share the gospel, and we who follow him must do no less – even if we might be misunderstood.

Secondly, every single one of us must do the inviting, not just one or two or a handful...all of us. The woman Jesus met at the well was really a nobody, she was not anyone special. In fact, she was looked down upon by the Jews and probably the people of her own town. She seemed to be full of shame because she seemed to be trying to avoid people. She went to a well that was further away from her town and during a part of the day most women would not go to a well. She seemed to be trying to avoid people, but then she met Jesus.

She knew who she was. She knew what she had done. She knew the people of her town had no reason to listen to her, but after she encountered Jesus, she went and told them about him anyway. She invited them to “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” And people “left the city and were on their way to him.” And the scripture tells us “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony.” People came to know Jesus because this woman simply invited them to come see him with her.

Most of us have come to Varnell UMC for different reasons, but we returned because we found something we liked, something that called us back, something that touched our lives here. Of

course, ultimately it was your search for God or your faith in Jesus Christ or your experience with the Holy Spirit that brought you back here, but there were other things that kept you coming back to this particular church. There are probably a hundred churches within a 10 mile radius of this facility that you could have attended, but something made this one special. Maybe it was the friendly atmosphere that Varnell UMC has. Maybe it was because you had family here or you grew up here. Maybe you got involved in a small group and have learned and enjoyed being in that group. Maybe you saw the great mission projects this church does and wanted to get involved. Maybe it was just the closest church to your home. Whatever the reason, you came back because you found something here. You found something that touched your life or met a need you had or helped you in a certain way, and you felt like you needed this place in your life, so you continue to come back. It is something special to you, something precious.

How many of you have children? How many of you have grandchildren? How many of you have great grandchildren? My guess is, each one of those children are precious to you, aren't they? How many of you who have children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren, have never shared a story about them or a picture of them with anyone? How many of you have just kept completely silent about them? None of you! I am sure each one of you have invited people, and sometimes maybe complete strangers, to share in your joy with these children or yours. You show pictures and videos or told stories about them to others. You shared fond memories of them. Then what is stopping you from sharing the news of the loving God we serve and this wonderful church with others?

There have been many persons who have been a part of this church that have done just this. As I was working on this sermon I remember some of the stories I have heard of people like Jimmy Wilson, Mary Martha Wilson, and I am sure there are a few other names I cannot recall who invited almost anyone they came into contact with to this church. My guess is many of you are here today because of these persons, and all they did was invite you to join them at Varnell UMC.

We need to be like the Samaritan woman Jesus met at Jacob's well. We know what God has done for us. We know what Jesus did for us on the cross. We know how the Holy Spirit can help those who have him working in them. We know what this church can do and mean for people. Because of all this, we should be inviting everyone we see to come and join us on this wonderful journey. And I promise, when we do, we will find "great joy" because we will be fulfilling one of our callings as a Christian.

So let us all go from this place and find "great joy in inviting everyone to be disciples of Jesus Christ with us."

Objective of Sermon

To expand upon Varnell UMC's new vision statement. To discuss that we all must be inviting others to join us on this journey with God.



Sermon Notes

Things I would like to remember from today's sermon:



Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day:

Replace this text with short prayer to pray for the week.

My Prayers for this week:



Grow-Pray-Study

Find Great Joy in Inviting Everyone

Sermon Notes

John 4:5-30, 39-42

I. Heading

- a. Replace with quote.
- b. Replace with quote.

II. Heading

- a. Replace with quote.
- b. Replace with quote.
 - 1. Replace with quote.
 - 2. Replace with quote.
- c. Replace with quote.

III. Heading

- a. Replace with quote.
- b. Replace with quote.

IV. Closing

- a. Replace with quote.
- b. Replace with quote.



Monday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.



Thursday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.



Tuesday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.



Friday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.



Wednesday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.



Saturday – Book C:V-V

Replace this text some short thoughts or questions focused on the daily reading, leaving space at the bottom for notes.

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