

Nothing In Common?

John 4:5-42

Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans.

That's the nub of it. That's the crux of it. That's the issue here.

Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans.

It's a very contemporary issue, isn't it? A current issue. And, now, I'm not talking about Jews and Samaritans . . . I'm talking about the rising voice of modern Australia. I'm talking about the increased polarization and segmentation of Australian society. I'm talking about politicians who say, 'we will shut the door on those who do not adopt our values and beliefs'! In other words, we won't share unless you are like us!

Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans.

Yep, we get it. We get it all too clearly. We get it because it's closer to home than we even realise. You may have heard of a recently formed church who call themselves Lutheran Mission Australia. In some parts of Australia LMA congregations have asked if they can use LCA church buildings to worship, and the answer has been 'no'.

It seems LCA Lutherans don't share things in common with LMA Lutherans!

Just as Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans.

Well, you see, from the Jews' perspective the Samaritans had it all wrong. Their ancestry was wrong . . . they were foreigners who came back from exile in Assyria and intermarried. Their sacred places were wrong. Their worship was wrong: they didn't recognize the temple in Jerusalem, but a temple that lay in ruins on Mount Gerazim. And, a temple in ruins is obviously not the true temple, is it?

So, Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans . . . which really means Jews don't have anything to do with Samaritans . . . and that's just how it is. And, I'm sure it seemed to them that that's how it always had been.

So, no wonder the woman is surprised when Jesus talks to her!

And, maybe, Jesus was just as surprised when the woman talked back?!

They both knew how it was . . . Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans. But, still, Jesus starts a conversation . . . a conversation between a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman! And, this is one gutsy woman. She doesn't look away . . . she doesn't pretend she didn't hear. No, she doesn't

take a backward step. She's not intimidated by the situation. She meets Jesus head-on. She's not afraid to say it how it is . . . to express her opinion . . . to be real. They converse as equals . . . about those things they *don't* share in common . . . ancestry . . . worship . . . temple. They talk economics, and relationships and politics and theology. Which mountain is sacred: this one, or the Mount of Olives? All these things are important and it's a fascinating conversation, but as we listen to it, it is easy to forget why they are both there in the first place . . . at the well . . . this Jewish man and this Samaritan woman . . . who don't share things in common . . . this Son of God and this daughter of God . . . it's easy to forget they are both there because they are thirsty! They both needed a drink. This they have in common. How very human of them.

And, it's there . . . at that meeting point . . . at that *common* point . . . that Jesus starts a conversation . . . about something they *do* share in common. There were so many reasons to *not* have the conversation . . . to simply accept that Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans and that's just how it is! So many reasons . . . but, Jesus chooses to look past her gender . . . and her ethnicity . . . and her skin colour . . . and her religious beliefs . . . and he talks to her! It just starts with a conversation . . . a conversation that gets deeper as they go along . . . until the woman gradually discovers who Jesus is . . . or, at least, who she thinks he might be!

And, at that moment, the disciples arrive back on the scene . . . and, taking their cue from Jesus, they start chatting with the woman too . . . finding out about her . . . telling their own stories . . . well, obviously the old order of things has been done away with. How it was is no longer how it is!

Except it doesn't happen that way at all, does it? No, the disciples arrive back . . . they see Jesus talking to a woman . . . and they don't say a word. They don't say a word. They are astounded that Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman . . . and they don't say a word, because Jews and Samaritans don't share things in common. Everyone knows that! That's *just* how it is.

That's a very contemporary issue, isn't it?

But, having met Jesus . . . after having a *conversation* with Jesus, the woman runs back to the city and tells other people about their conversation. And, they come to meet Jesus too . . . they come to talk with Jesus. They come to get to know Jesus. And many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.

And, it started with a conversation.

How would it be if Jesus' disciples started with a conversation? Instead of not saying a word, what if they started a conversation? What if *they* could look beyond the gender, and the colour of skin, and the social status, and the culture, and the history, and the ancestry, and the politics, and the religion. Who knows what might happen? Yes, I know, there are so many reasons *not* to have a conversation . . . there are so many things that make people different from each other . . . and so many differences that keep people *from* each other . . . but, I also know for sure that we all get thirsty . . . we all need to drink . . . we all come looking for the well, sometime . . . and not just to fill our water buckets.

And here's the thing I love most about this story . . . after all that talking . . . after all that to-ing and fro-ing . . . after all that interaction, after all that . . . the woman didn't fill her bucket from the well . . . and Jesus didn't get his drink . . . but they both went away with what they needed . . . with *more* than they needed!

Jews don't share things in common with Samaritans. Perhaps that's where the conversation starts?

Amen.

Pastor John Strelan
St John's Lutheran Church, Unley
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