

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“CHANGED LIVES - THE WOMAN AT THE WELL”  
John 4:5-42  
February 24, 2008  
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

According to scientists, diamonds are the hardest minerals in the world and one of the world's most precious gems. They are 1000 times harder than rubies or sapphires. Not even the most powerful acids can harm a diamond's surface. They are invincible.

We get diamonds from the earth. Millions of years ago pockets of carbon dioxide existed deep beneath the Earth's crust. Extreme heat and pressure caused the carbon atoms to crystallize forming diamonds. Pressure built up causing volcanic eruptions that brought the diamonds up to the surface. That is why it is very rare to find a diamond, another reason they're so valuable.

When I was young I watched Superman create a diamond from a piece of coal. Well, it's not quite that simple, though both diamonds and coal come from carbon. Diamonds are produced at a much greater depth, perhaps fifty mile under the earth's crust. Diamonds are one of God's great gifts to us. And to think they began as a few carbon atoms. God can do amazing things. He can change carbon atoms to diamonds, and he can change people from losers to winners.

Changed Lives! Our lesson today is about the woman at the well whose life was changed by Christ. This story is set in a place called Samaria.

At the time of Jesus his homeland was divided into three regions. Judea was southern Palestine, where Jerusalem and Bethlehem are located. Galilee

was northern Palestine, the home of Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee. There was a third territory between these two: Samaria, the district of the Samaritans. The Jews despised the Samaritans even more than they hated Gentiles, because they were a group of Jews from the province of Samaria who had intermarried with foreigners. Both claimed to be true descendants of the nation of Israel. But the Jews considered Samaritans as social outcasts, untouchables, racially inferior, practicing a false religion. The Jews believed Jerusalem was the only true place of worship. The problem was that Jews could not travel between Judea and Galilee without passing through Samaria.

Any close physical contact with a Samaritan, drinking water from a common bucket, eating a meal together, would make a Jew ceremonially unclean. This meant they were unable to participate in temple worship for a period of time. The hostility between the two groups was so great that Jewish travelers usually chose not to travel through the area where the Samaritans lived. They would not even talk to each other. The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was very similar to the relationship between Jews and Palestinians today.

Perhaps I have given you sufficient enough background to say, this was not a problem for Jesus. Jesus and his disciples have been traveling for some distance and he is tired and thirsty. His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. He sits down by a well known as Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water. Jesus says to her, ***"Will you give me a drink?"***

Not only were there strict rules about Jews and Samaritans talking with one another. There were also rules about men and women conversing.

The Samaritan woman is surprised, and somewhat rude. She says to him, ***"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"***

Well I'm glad you asked that question, because this is Park Hill, a

church where we believe that when you remove blind hatred from human relationships, you can solve most of the world's problems. **“We are an inclusive community of faith, embracing spirituality, diversity, service, unconditional acceptance and the care and support of all people.”** This is no place for blind hatred! Jews and Arabs, militant Islamists and the people of the West. Blacks and whites, Anglos and Latinos, straight and gay. They are all welcomed here.

***“Neither height nor depth nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, neither life nor death, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

We look different from most churches because we are. We were not created to hate. The greatest problem in our world today is the animosity between differing groups of people.

**This Samaritan woman's life was changed because Jesus reached out to her.** He looked beyond her faults and focused directly on her needs. What a lesson for the church! When we are not blinded by hatred we can turn a chance encounter into an opportunity for transformation.

Jesus says to her, ***“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”*** A chance encounter results in a gift of grace, the gift of ***“living water”***. He explains to her that if you drink this living water, you will never be thirsty again.

It is amazing how a drink of water turns into a question of marital history. When she responds to his offer: ***“Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”*** Jesus says to her, ***“Go, call your husband and come back.”***

Her reply is ***“I have no husband”***. Is that a problem? ***“You are right when you say you have no husband.”*** Jesus replies quickly.

***“The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”***

***“Sir,”*** the woman says, ***“I can see that you are a prophet.”***

Yes, he was a prophet, a prophet who was breaking all the cultural taboos. He was reaching out to a woman, a Samaritan woman, a Samaritan woman who had been married five times and who was now living with a man who was not her husband. And he offers her grace. How can we do less?

Some faith communities have become so judgmental toward others that they have completely missed the grace that God provides in the Gospel. God must have one church where people who are shut out and disapproved of, as the woman of Samaria, can experience God’s grace. We are called to love those for whom Christ died. God’s grace is available to all. And that’s Good News!

Far too many people in the church are blinded by their prejudices toward people like the Samaritan woman with her unseemly lifestyle. Could it be that we are also blinded to the fact that we are the Samaritan woman. We, too, have fallen short of the grace of God, but the hand of grace is reached out to us as well.

**A chance encounter brings about a changed life.** When Jesus’ disciples returned, they are surprised to find him talking with a woman. She leaves her water jar, goes back to the town and invites the people to, ***“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”*** And according to the Gospel of John, the people came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ***“He told me everything I ever did.”*** They listened and they believed. A Samaritan woman with a questionable lifestyle becomes a recipient of God’s grace and now she is a vehicle of grace to guide others to Christ.

They said to the woman, *“We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”* What a witness!

I would love to invite you to be a witness here at Park Hill. I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church, where **“We embrace spirituality, diversity, service, unconditional acceptance and the care and support of all people.”** God can do amazing things. **“The One who knows you best loves you most.”**