

Notes on John 4 : 1 – 26 ‘Sitting around the kitchen table – chewing the fat’

Wherever you look you will see this woman and there will be no air brushing of her creases, no excuses about her age or mobility, sheer wonder at all of her achievements, amazement about her longevity and maybe even curiosity about her faith. Who am I speaking about? If you answered the Queen, you would be right, but I am also thinking about this woman here in John chapter 4, the woman at the well. In John 4 we read about Jesus and this woman chewing the fat. This wonderfully evocative image originated in India where the British soldiers softened the cloth cartridges for their rifles, which were waterproofed in fat, by chewing on them. But the phrase also has its roots in the term ‘Chewing the rag’ which describes women talking together while they sewed. In the Gospels, especially in John with his long accounts of conversations Jesus had, you find Jesus chewing the fat and John writes not because they are models of personal evangelism we’re to imitate as such, but signposts on our journey with Jesus.

Last week I showed a picture of the first Russian soldier tried for war crimes in the Ukraine, but do you know his name? It is Vadim Shishimarin. What is the name of the Samaritan woman at the well? The answer is we don’t know and like Vadim Shishimarin, all we are told about her is that she is a model of shame. Her shame was rooted in her life of serial marriage, and now she even did not have this as the man she lives with was not even her husband. Because of this she was excluded from her community and her peers and her shame stops her wishing to be seen with Jesus, as in verse 9. Jesus, however, is utterly shameless as he chooses to chew the fat over with her as they sit together at this well near Sychar. Chewing the fat is what evangelism is all about. John 4 is often presented as a model of personal evangelism and how to ‘swing the conversation’ we have with anyone towards being about Jesus. We’re told it is a demonstration of how we are to manipulate those who we may sit with to make them talk about Jesus and talk about him on our terms; as Andy described in his aeroplane story, he told at the last All Age service!! But this, is not what this story is about.

This story is a story about a woman protecting her shame and her seeking to manipulate Jesus away from that which terrifies her the most. The irony of the story is that in doing so she is avoiding that which would bring her the wholeness and quality of life she has always yearned for and which she testifies to, in verse 29. Jesus is not the master manipulator, something which I resist and rebel against, because he is not a rank salesman selling a product but someone who wants to honour and value the person he is talking with. Jesus in his conversation here demonstrates his desire to woo and win this woman, and so us, that we may be free from all shame and know instead the riches, depths and quality of life we can all have in him. Not that we are to hoard and keep this to

ourselves as he wants us to be those who are always willing to share what we have with all we meet. Jesus responds to the woman with the thickest of stories he can tell as he describes a world of countless wonders rooted in the height and length and breadth and depth of God's love. He invites her, and he invites us, into a story of living water, verse v10, and a life daily refreshed and renewed by the life we have in and of the Spirit. It is a story of eternal life, verse 14, and a life where heaven and earth meet together in joyful unity. It is a story of truth, verse 18, where he gently and graciously reveals the lies that are corrosively eating away at her heart and her life. It is a story of being made whole, or to experience Shalom, as described in verse v23, which speaks about a true balance and contentment in life because we know the presence of Jesus in all that we do. It is a story which is deeply and profoundly personal, as in verse 26, because Jesus does not merely want this woman to know things about him, he wants her to know him. Jesus did all of this without mentioning her as a sinner once!!

When we think about 'Sitting around the Kitchen table chewing the fat' about Jesus we panic because we find it hard to imagine a situation when we can do so. Below are numbers 33 – 40 of the 70 Acts of service which may well give us such an opportunity!!

33. What can you do to help? Clear a table in the café, stack the baskets or trolleys in a shop, put something back on a shelf if it has fallen off. Yes, technically you'll be doing a job that someone else is paid to do, but your helpfulness might be making someone's day a little less stressful.

34. Fix something quick and simple for someone today. Change a light bulb, sew on a button, or teach someone a few shortcuts on the computer.

35. We've probably all got things at home we can share. A spare nearly-new toolkit, two copies of the same book ... you get the idea. What could you share with someone else today? Snap a photo and post it on social media, letting your friends know they can have it for free. 36. Offer to do the tea/coffee run at work or wash up everyone's mugs at the end of the day. Say 'yes' to that difficult task announced at a meeting. You get the idea... run with it!

37. Bring in your neighbours' bins this week – or even for the whole street!

38. Could you support people in your community and the NHS during times of need? Become an Emergency Response Volunteer – find out more from the Royal Voluntary Service www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

39. Plant a community garden. Who could you work with in your local area on this? Then share what you grow!

40. The next time you get on a bus or go shopping – take something for the person serving you – some flowers, a bar of chocolate. Tell them what a great job they are doing.

I really like Andy's slide about prayer below because on this slide we can clearly see which statement applies to us and the sort of steps of faith I would like us all to take in telling others about Jesus. Jesus, like us, also learned to take such steps of faith. These steps began in prayer and in listening to Scripture as he learned his Father's will about who he was and what



he was to do. After his baptism and receiving the Spirit, he returned to where he grew up and he began to tell all he met about the Kingdom of God. Strengthened by the Spirit, may we all learn, like Jesus, to tell all we meet about the countless wonders of the Love of God we know in him.

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1. Why is the Samaritan Woman a model of shame and what were the consequences for her?
2. How do you understand her not wanting to even speak with Jesus?
3. Why does Andy think this story is not a model for personal evangelism?
4. Why does Jesus speak to this woman and what is his main motivation in doing so?
5. What is to motivate us to tell others about Jesus?
6. Jesus in verses 10, 14, 18, 23 and 26 tells her a thick story for her to build her life on; which one speaks to you the most?
7. Which of the 70 Acts of service Andy refers to do you think you can do?
8. In the slide on prayer that Andrew used, what encourages you the most and what is the greatest challenge?