

March 7, 2012

Questions for Lent and Easter  
The Evangelism Question  
John 4:27-38

**Opening Words:** John Simone Sr. once said, "*The key to wisdom is knowing all the right questions.*" I think he is right. Even without answers, questions have value. After all, what is a question? A question is nothing more than a request for more information. Only fools think they know everything. How many questions have you asked in the past week? How many questions have you asked in the past month? How many questions have you asked in the past year? Jesus asked twenty questions in the Gospel of John. Those questions are the foundation of my newest sermon series, *Questions for Lent and Easter*. We are going to look at twelve different questions the Master asked. Each one is an excellent question because each one is timeless.

This is message number five. This evening we are in the fourth chapter of John. The ones asking the questions this evening are the disciples. They leave to get food and return to witness something strange to their eyes. Jesus is speaking to a Samaritan woman at the well in the heat of the day. Let me call this message this evening *The Evangelism Question*. May God give you ears to hear this evening's scripture lesson, John 4:27-38.

---

**John 4:27-38** 27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

---

Winston Churchill once said, "*A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.*" What is an opportunity? It is

a chance, especially one that offers some kind of advantage. We see people seize opportunities all the time. When was the last time you seized an opportunity? When was the last time you let an opportunity slip away? Let me give you a few examples of lost opportunities.

In 1859, Edwin Drake was looking for investors in his new invention called the oil well. They responded, "Drill for oil? You mean drill into the ground to try and find oil? You're crazy."

In 1878, an internal memo at Western Union announced: "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication.

In 1879, a young clerk found that the hardware store where he worked had thousands of items that were obsolete or seldom bought. He convinced the owner to let him have a ten cent sale. It was a fabulous success, but when the clerk asked for capital for a new store that would sell all items for a nickel or dime, the boss said, "The plan will never work; you can't find enough items to sell for 5 or 10 cents." So Frank Woolworth took out a loan for \$300 and made millions with his five and dime stores.

In 1899, Charles Duell, of the US Office of Patents, said, "Everything that can be invented has been invented."

In 1947, the invention of the transistor was rejected by several electronics companies. They rejected the idea of a transistor radio because they believed no one would carry a radio around.

In 1977, Ken Olson, president of Digital Equipment, said "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

Fred Smith received a 'C' from a Yale Professor on his paper proposing an overnight delivery service "The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a 'C', the idea must be feasible." The company was the being of Federal Express.

In 2000, gold was at \$250 in 2000; today, about \$1700.

In 2004, Google stock debuted for about \$100. Today, it trades for over \$600.

I tell you those nine stories of missed opportunities to make a single point. The mainline Protestant church is missing a great opportunity. This could be the greatest period in the history of the American church. The winds of Pentecost are blowing a gale. People are asking all kinds of spiritual questions. Jesus says it clearly, "The harvest is bountiful but the labors are few." The church should be

booming. How many booming mainline Protestant do you know? How many mainline Protestant churches are dying? How many mainline Protestant churches do you know won't be in existence in ten years? We should be booming! We are missing our opportunity to reach new generation with the Gospel for many reasons. Everyone seems to have an opinion of why this is happening. I believe we have lost our focus. We used to have a passion for saving the lost. There was a time when we worried about someone else's salvation. Now, we only worry about our personal likes and dislikes. We have constructed manmade boundaries, which have limited our mission field. This evening's scripture illustrates that divine truth.

The words you heard this evening are one of the great models of evangelism in the Bible. Let us look at those words together. According to the previous reading, Jesus is traveling from south to north. He went from Judea, where his popularity is lower, to Galilee, where his popularity was higher. Between Judea and Galilee is the region of Samaria. The inhabitants of that land, the Samaritans were hated. They were seen as half breeds. History tells us their Jewish ancestors had married Gentiles during the dispensation, creating a mixed race of people. Let's just call it what it was, discrimination! They were hated by the Jews for compromising the faith. The disciples wanted to hurry through this land. However, Jesus interacts with the inhabitants. One of the people he talks to is the woman at the well. Now, don't run by that statement too quickly! To our generation that statement seems harmless; to Jesus' generation it was scandalous. Why? It was scandalous because the Master crossed several manmade boundaries to interact with her. Let me just mention a few.

- 1. There was the political boundary** (Jew verses Samaritan)
- 2. There was the gender boundary** (Man verses woman)
- 3. There was the social boundary** (high morals verses low morals)

Any of these boundaries would have been enough to excuse Jesus from relating to this woman. However, Jesus related to this Samaritan woman with low morals because he only saw a lost soul. The only thing that really mattered to Jesus was the lost. The disciples are shocked but they know Jesus' motives. It is for this reason they never ask this evening's question, "Why are you talking to her?" Jesus is talking to this woman because he was only interested in saving the lost. We know Jesus was only interested in saving the lost. So why have so many good church folks lost their passion for saving the lost? Why have so many good church folks become so passionate about secondary things? If that makes you ponder say, **"Amen!"**

Several weeks ago, I was at a district meeting in Howland. The pastor of the Howland United Methodist Church is Matt Darrin. He has only been there several months. I do not know Matt well; I want to get to know him better. He is the

best thing to happen to that congregation in many years. When I came to Western Reserve in 1994, the Howland Church averaged about 300 worshippers per week. That church's attendance has eroded annually. Before Matt arrived, they averaged less than 150. Everyone left for a different reason. Some died; some relocated. Some left because they were bored; some left because they were burned in some ugly church conflict. Matt's single job is to rebuild the church. He has only been there eight months but the church is starting to show signs of life. He told us about the changes he made to attract the lost in the Howland area.

- 1. He no longer wears a robe.**
- 2. They no longer recite liturgy.**
- 3. They no longer sing hymns written before his birth.**
- 4. They welcomed a projection system into the sanctuary.**

Those that have a heart for saving the lost are thrilled. Those who have a passion for secondary things aren't so happy. The changes were made to speak to a new generation. Matt says he hears it repeatedly. They miss the robe; they miss the liturgy and the old hymns. They don't just dislike the projection system; they hate the projection system. They are unhappy and they want everyone to know it. They are making their point clearly. They are passionate about their likes and dislikes. However, they care very little about the lost. Aren't you glad we don't have people like that here? Jesus only worried about saving the lost. What are you worried about? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me end with this story.

In September of 1985 the New Orleans' municipal pool had a party. They were celebrating the fact for the first time in recent memory no one drowned during the summer. In honor of the occasion, 200 people gathered, including 100 certified lifeguards. As the party was breaking up and the four lifeguards on duty began to clear the pool, a lifeless body was found floating in the deep end. They tried to revive Jerome Moody, 31, but it was too late. He had drowned surrounded by lifeguards. I hate to ask this question.

Could that be the story of the mainline Protestant church in our time? There are people dying everyday without Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They are going to spend eternity in hell. Why doesn't anyone in the church seem to care? Will you pray with me?