



BelPres Church

Telling the Story

Speaker: Anthony Ballard

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Good morning, good to see everyone here. Those of you online, thanks for joining us. And what's funny is, it's Palm Sunday, but the scripture is not from Palm Sunday at all. It's like a totally different thing. That's because Pastor Scott preached it two weeks ago. And so now I have to preach on something that's not in line with the day, but it's okay, it'll be all right.

If you don't know me, my name is Anthony Ballard. I lead our discipleship ministry here at BelPres. And today's scripture is coming from John chapter four, starting at verse four.

You have a moment. If you want, we have Bibles here in the back of the room, over on the side. If you want a hard copy Bible, we're gonna be reading actually a lot this morning. It'll be on the screen, but hard copies are cool. So while you're turning there, let me recap. John four, starting at verse four.

But as we recap, we've been for 11 weeks since January, we've been in this series called Unleash Good News. And we've been talking about how Jesus has been good news and about how sharing our Jesus story and how Jesus has been good news in our lives.

And we've been writing in this journal, telling our Jesus story, let me get it, our this Unleash Good News journal. And we've been talking about how Jesus has been good news in our lives, and a way to say that is evangelism. The word evangelism.

And that word, for some of you, brings a lot of excitement, because some of you love sharing about Jesus with other people that you don't know, and you're really good at it. You have great talking points and ideas.

And others of you, this brings up fear and concern, and you're thinking about all the people in the stadiums and concerts who are with the signs and yelling at people, or other internet discourse that you're seeing.

And, but the plan was for this journal, that where you can have a personal story of how Jesus has been good news to you in your own life. And that you would then share that good news with people by the end of the series.

And we were at the end of the series. And so, now we take this good news, and we're supposed to share this with someone. And that's our action step already, actually. 30 seconds into the sermon, your action step is to share your good news with someone. That's what this has been building to this whole time. And that leads us to a question, though.

Two questions, actually. Will we actually do it? Will we actually go out there and talk about this stuff? And I know enthusiastically in your mind, you're like, yes, we're gonna do it today, right after church. Good. So, the second question is, who do we share this good news with?

Who do we share this good news with? I think that some people are hard to unleash good news to. Because, you know, we want to, ideally, we're doing this to people who we know, who we have a personal relationship with in some way.

And not just a stranger on the street. But the people we love, I think, for me personally, are some of the most challenging people to share our Christian faith with. Because we want to be liked by them.

We want to keep that relationship with each other. We want our friends and our family members, our schoolmates, to be friends with us, to love us and to connect with us. And sometimes, religion can cause a rift.

And so we all have our personal reasons why we don't share. But you can search the whole of scripture. You can search the whole of scripture.

And you do not get an out from doing this. There is no place that says, you know, actually, don't share the faith. Don't do it this week. You're not good at it. You stutter. Don't do it.

There's no where that says that. The charge is always to still share about Jesus and the good news that comes from him. And so the other people that are challenging to speak to also are people that we don't like.

The people who bring the worst out of us. Maybe it's family members we don't talk to or people who always post their politics online. Those are also challenging people to share our faith with.

And that actually brings us to our scripture, John chapter four, starting at verse four. And it says, Now he, Jesus, had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given his son, Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink?

His disciples had gone to town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Now, in most hard copy Bibles, there's a note at the bottom of the page that clarifies something, where it says Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

What it's actually saying is, Jews do not even use the same dishes as Samaritans. That's a whole other thing. That's not simply saying these people don't cross paths or that they're crosstown rivals and don't like each other that much.

That means they don't even have respect or even have consideration for this group of people. And the thing is, from a first century Jewish perspective, there were, there was, they had their reasons for not associating with this group.

And this wasn't just racism, but it was a people group who were mixed, but the Samaritans, they weren't just a mixed people. They had mixed the worship of their gods together. They had mixed worship with Yahweh, with the gods of Babylon.

And so imagine you came to church today, and there was a song about Jesus, and the next two songs were about Thor and Odin. Ideally, you would get up and leave, right? Or say, hey, wait, wait, time out, stop the music. That's mixing the worship of different gods. That's what these people were doing.

And so not only were the Samaritans ethnically different, but they had tainted the worship of the god who saved these people, who rescued them from their enemies, who gave them a new land to live in, and who was good to them and loved them.

And so this was not just a trivial matter, but it was serious for them. And so you add all that together, and the reality is that the Jews, from their cultural context, did not even eat off the plates that Samaritans had used.

It's like, imagine me as an African American man going to a town filled with the Ku Klux Klan and then trying to be there and preach there. I would actually rather avoid that town, if I say so myself. But yet it says that Jesus had to go through the very place that he was supposed to avoid. Which brings up, who are the people that you want to avoid? Who do you dislike, disdain?

That may be the very people that Jesus wants you to unleash good news to. It says that he had to go through Samaria. So why not you? Why not me? What lets us off the hook? Nothing.

So let's keep reading in verse 10, and I'm just gonna warn you now. We're gonna read a lot, and I tried to cut some of this out, but man, this is like one of Jesus' best exchanges in Scripture, so we're gonna read the whole thing. Get ready.

Jesus answered 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. Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.

Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock?

Jesus answered, everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up into eternal life.

The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. He told her, go, call your husband and come back. I have no husband, she replied.

Jesus said to her, you are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.

Sheesh, Jesus put it all out there. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

Woman, Jesus replied, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship of the Father in spirit and in truth. For they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth.

And the woman said, I know that the Messiah called Christ is coming and when he comes, he will explain everything to us. And then Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, am he. Man, you know, there's a lot going on with this lady.

There's some serious drama happening in her life, all kinds of problems and issues. And I think even people who don't value marriage, who's like marriage is just a little piece of paper, no big deal. I think even for them, by number five, they would probably tell this person like, hey, maybe you should chill out a little bit. Take it easy. Five's a lot.

But she certainly had some sin going on in her life. And but she was searching for something too. She was searching for love, I think, for a life to live, for water, both spiritual and natural water, and a lot more.

And that's because she's not really much different from you or me, or the people that we need to share this good news of Jesus with. All of us are looking for something, some type of purpose or some hope in our lives.

We have some hole that we're trying to fill with things that can only be filled with Jesus.

And so the moment that everyone had been waiting for in that time and that culture, they had been waiting for the Messiah to show up and arrive, and for the Jews and the Samaritans.

And the Messiah, especially in pop culture, the Messiah word means like chosen one, the person who's like the coolest in the story generally. But biblically, Messiah means anointed one. That is someone who's been set apart by God for a purpose.

And in this case, the Messiah was the king and savior of the world. And so the Jews thought the Messiah would only be for them. But by going through Samaria, Jesus was now showing that he was the Messiah, the king over everyone.

Even in some cases, our very enemies, the people that we don't like. And I love the way Jesus reveals his Messiahship to the woman by saying, simply, simply, simply, simply saying, I am he. Or other translations would even say, I am.

And it speaks that all the desires this woman had, all the fears, the shame, the dreams, things that she had, she had been searching for and everything else, all of that will be then solved in Jesus himself.

After this moment, Jesus' disciples, they were shocked to find him speaking with the woman, and even more so, a Samaritan woman. But Jesus is showing again that he is saviour of the whole world, even the people we don't deem worthy.

And so this is something that non-Christians admire a lot, especially those who like Jesus but aren't following Jesus. They will often say, like, Jesus was this revolutionary who hung out with sinners and outcasts. You guys should be like him.

And they're right, Jesus did do all those things. But the difference between me and you hanging out with sinners and outcasts all the time is that when sinners and outcasts hung out with Jesus, they did not stay sinners and outcasts.

They were changed. So Jesus, when he sits with the sinner, the sinner leaves behind their life of sin, like this woman is about to do. When Jesus sits with the outcasts, they are welcomed to his table and they sit in places of honor.

They're no longer on the outskirts. They're not shamed into the kingdom. They're not coerced, but they have an encounter with the Lord, because all who encounter the Messiah Jesus are changed. And so this is what happens with the woman with the five husbands, with the Samaritan woman.

She has five husbands, and the text doesn't say that, doesn't say it, but I think we can assume that five husbands and with the current one not her husband, that she didn't just have bad luck, but something was going on in her.

And Jesus calls it out, not to shame her, not to put her down, but her response instead leads to a cultural revolution.

And in verse 28 and 29, it says, Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to town and said to the people, Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?

Jesus told her all her sin, everything she ever did, yet that spurred her out to go and tell other people everything she ever did. They probably already knew anyway. But that led her out.

And she said, Come and see, right? And so she doesn't do any convincing to the townspeople. She doesn't have a five point evangelism plan.

She doesn't take an evangelism course on YouTube first. She goes straight from Jesus to then telling people about him. And she just says, Come and see.

And in verse 39 and 42, it says, Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I ever did. And then in 42, it says, They said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves. And we know this man really is the Savior of the world. From her witnessing, other people then came to faith.

They came to believe not because of her convincing language, but all because of what she told them. And then they too had an encounter with Jesus after he spent some time with them.

And all of us have some type of Jesus story, just one thing that Jesus, it's why you're here in this room. There's something that Jesus has done for you, or you're even hoping for Jesus to do that has you here.

And there's someone out there who needs to hear just that one story from you.

You know, I try to make a point that whenever I'm up here, especially if we have some type of action to do, I try to make a point that I'm actually doing the thing I'm gonna be preaching about, because I don't want to be a hypocrite, and then you guys are all like, did you do it? And I'm like, no, but this time I did. So, a true story. Last month, I took my car in to get repaired and for some maintenance.

And while my car was being serviced, it was going to take a while, and they offered a service to give me a ride back home. And the driver who is going to give me a ride back home, his name was Romeo.

And while I was sitting in the back seat of the car, I was just reading a book, really wanted to like, not say anything. And he was playing all these different types of music in the car.

And then eventually a song came on that was, what sounded to me like a gospel song. And I was like, I know gospel music, that sounds like Jesus music. But I don't feel like talking, so I'm just gonna sit here.

But then, when the song title was called, I'm a Blood Bot Child of God. And as I wanted to sit there, I remembered what Pastor Scott said a couple weeks ago about evangelism T-ball, which is like the ball's right there, you can't miss it.

And if you do miss it, you shouldn't be missing it. Or in basketball, for basketball people, it's called an open layup. Open layups, you do not miss. And so I said something. I said, I like this song. And he replied, he said, I love this song too.

He said, I listen to it every morning. It's very important to me. And I said, it's a song about Jesus. Are you a Christian? And he said, he said, no, I'm not a Christian. And then I realized it was the open layup.

And I better not miss. And so, he said, I'm not a Christian and I don't go to church. He said, but I believe in Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit.

And I said, uh, bro, that's everything. That's more than most church people believe, okay? So he told me, though, he said, I don't like to call myself a Christian because I don't want people to see me and then talk bad about Jesus.

And he felt what he sees in culture happening now is that people are talking bad about Jesus. And he said, Jesus has changed my life, and I don't want to hear people say bad things about him.

And he said, at one point in his life, he lived a life of violence, and he had been shot and stabbed, and he almost died. And in that moment, Jesus told him, if you don't change your life, you will die.

And it wasn't in that moment where he had immediately changed things, but from there, that point on, he was not the same. And Jesus saved him from that life of violence into a new life. And he said, I tell everyone all the time, Jesus saved me.

Jesus saved me. And he went on to tell me that last summer, his wife was healed from cancer. And he said, Jesus now saved me, and then now he saved my wife. And he said, not only did Jesus save me, he said, also my wife saved me, saved my life as well. Those are the two most important people in my life.

And he also said that his friend, he has a friend who's an atheist, and after years of sharing how Jesus had transformed his life, he said, his friend was always like, hey, Romeo, stop sharing all that stuff, it's stupid, I don't want to hear it

about this Jesus stuff. But he said, one day when his friend was having a moment of crisis, his friend told him, Romeo, I think that Jesus stuff you're talking about, it might be true. You've been talking about it for years, and you might be right.

The whole time, he was saying, Jesus did this, Jesus did that for a 25-minute car ride, over and over again. And I thought I was gonna share the good news with him. But he had unleashed it on me. And I have Romeo's phone number. I invited him to church. He was not able to make it today.

But one of these days, I'm gonna keep talking to him and invite him and encourage him to visit here. And maybe your story, though, is not as intense as Romeo's. Maybe you haven't been shot or stabbed or anything.

But maybe you've faced depression or a lack of purpose in your life or failures in your life that just crush you, and you're not sure how you can come through. How has Jesus been good news to you in that way?

And there is someone, somewhere, that can use your Jesus story to know what Jesus has done for you. You know, Romeo, he might not go to church or even call himself a Christian, but certainly the man has a Jesus story, as you hear.

And we're seeing that we are back in a time and an era where people are open to hearing about spiritual matters more than they were in a long time.

There's all kinds of articles and research and data showing that we are in a time where people want to hear some type of truth or faith or spiritual matters. And they're open to all kinds.

And ideally, we're sharing with them the truth and the good news of Jesus. If you look at verse 35, it says that Jesus says, don't you have a saying that is four months until a harvest? He says, I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. We are in a harvest time where people want some spirituality. They want some truth.

And the people who don't know Jesus, the Samaritans in our lives, the family members we don't talk to anymore, the people who are from different tribes and beliefs, the people whose dishes we will not eat from.

Jesus calls these same people, he calls them the harvest. And he wants them. They are precious to him. And he wants them to know him. And they're worth him going out of his way for. And so he sends us out to go and share the good news with them.

And in the US., most people already have some idea of who Jesus is. Most times they're wrong about who he is. Sometimes they're right.

But the thing they're looking for, they're not looking for theology, they're not looking for doctrine, but they are looking for what use is Jesus? What's he going to do for me? And they need to know what has he done for you.

So you don't even have to be the smartest person. You just need an experience and an encounter with him.

And when I think about it, here especially in the States, like there is a reason why the first thing that comes to our mind when we hear the word evangelism is usually like fearful things generally.

We're thinking of the people who are yelling and screaming on the street. We're thinking of all the reasons why we can't share, that our boss might fire us or something like that. I hear that from some of you when we talk.

That's the first thing that comes to our mind. I'm like, why is that? You know, there is a person that does not want to sharing any of this good news about Jesus.

And it actually isn't your boss, and it's not your friends, and it's not your family members either. The Bible says that the person who's against all this stuff is Satan. The Bible says Satan is our adversary. That means he's against everything. He's not actually for anything, but he's against everything.

So that the wholeness and the freedom and the love and the hope that comes from the good news of Jesus, the adversary then comes to steal it, kill it, and destroy it. All that stuff that we're trying to say and all the fears that pop up, it's from the enemy. And this happens above all because evangelism isn't just words, but it's a spiritual matter.

We're engaging in a spiritual activity when we share the good news of Jesus. It's a message of the kingdom of light that is pushing back the kingdom of darkness.

And the gospel, I mean, we call this series Unleashed Good News so that it can be unleashed out into the world. But we get leashed by our own fear and we get leashed by Satan himself. And as we've been in this series, we've been saying, we've been using the word, the phrase good news because it's really easy to understand in our modern times.

But personally, my charge to you is to get comfortable, very comfortable using the word gospel, use the word gospel.

Because the word gospel, while it means good news, it carries the way more weight and significance than just any old good news, like news or the weather or something like that.

The gospel comes from the Greek word, euangelion, which was a royal announcement. It was a proclamation announcing victory and the reign of a new king. The euangelion or the gospel, it was not even a religious word actually.

It was a word that was used in kingdoms all over the place, or specifically in Rome, and it became associated with Christianity when Christians started to proclaim that Jesus was Lord, or that Jesus was the Messiah.

So we actually copied the word that was already existing in the culture. Regular good news is that when the stock market is up, that's good news for people when that happens. The good news is that the sun is out when the sun is out in Seattle.

That's good news. Or when you have good grades, or you got into the college you want to get into, or if you sold your house or bought a house, that's good news. It's not, I'm not even joking.

It's good news. But the gospel is a proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the anointed one, and he is the king.

It's not even in the same category as like normal good news. It's like a different thing altogether. And so we care about general good news.

And we, but the gospel is so much more. And this announcement of the gospel isn't even that we get to die and go to heaven. And it's not even that the person that you're sharing with gets to die and go to heaven. Again, we care, but it's so much more. The gospel is 100% always about who Jesus is and what he has done for you and for all of us. So a little Bible trivia.

Who was the first person to share the gospel? That is the announcement that Jesus had come into the world. It actually isn't a story that you hear at least once a year, but never during this time of year.

It's in Luke chapter 2. It happens in what's called Little Town of Bethlehem. An angel appears to these lowly shepherds, and the angel speaks to them, and we're familiar most often where it says, he brings tidings.

But other translations will say, he brings good news. But really, in the original language, what he's saying is, I bring you the euangelion. I bring you the gospel that born to you today is a savior, a king whose name is Jesus.

The first evangelist was an angel from heaven to bring good news to shepherds in the fields. And that means that when you share the good news of Jesus, whether it's a big story or a small story, you are sharing the same message that angels preach.

You are sharing a message of heaven. You are sharing a spiritual message that changes realities of people. The shepherds' response to this angel, when this angel preached, the shepherds would say, let's go see this thing that the Lord has done.

We gotta go see, check this out. Now, the Samaritan woman, her invitation was come and see. Anytime Jesus does anything, you gotta check it out. It has to be witnessed, it has to be seen. And so, as we're wrapping up, we're at the end of this sermon series. Our journals are all filled out.

Just kidding, I know we didn't all do the homework. Some people did, but we got these journals. And when I think about where we're at now, we have a story.

Some of them are big stories, some of them are small stories. But there is a person somewhere that needs to then hear this story. Why do you serve and follow Jesus?

And at the end of this journal, it has a suggestion for all of us to say, one, pray and ask who can we share this with? And the other one says, an exercise that says, take 60 seconds to say one good thing about Jesus. What is one piece of good news? What's one piece of gospel that you can share with someone about who Jesus is? Maybe Jesus, the Messiah, has been for you a provider.

Maybe there's something that you've lacked in your life that Jesus has given that you can't even explain through any natural means, but it has had to be supernatural and it has had to come through Jesus.

Maybe he's been the lamb that was slain for your life. That means you're someone who's burdened by all the sin in your life, like this woman, the Samaritan woman. But Jesus is the lamb that has washed away all the sins of our life.

The Bible also says that he's called the Lion of Judah, which means that he roars in the action on our behalf. That he defends us and protects us from enemies, from both spiritual and even physical enemies in cases, the Lion of Judah. And then we also know that he's powerful, that he's kind, and that he's full of love.

And the Bible says that he welcomed children to be around him, and that these children, he said, they were the example of how we all were supposed to enter into the kingdom, being like little children. Maybe Jesus has been a healer for you.

Maybe he's healed your body from some sickness that doctors couldn't figure out. Or maybe you're waiting for that healing, and you can still witness to people about what you're waiting for Jesus to do. He's been the forgiver, the defender, the protector. He's been something, because he's Jesus the Messiah. He is worth our sharing, our good news.

He is the gospel for not just Bel Pres, but he's gospel for the whole world. He is Jesus the Messiah, and we have a good news that must be unleashed into the world. So let us pray. Lord Jesus, help us. Give us courage. Give us faith to trust that the good news that comes from you is worth sharing.

In spite of any fear that we may face, Lord, we pray against the enemy who wants to steal, kill, and destroy this message. And we say that he will not. But Lord, your good news will go forth.

Your gospel will be proclaimed in the streets. It will be proclaimed in our lives. So Lord, call to mind for every person here one story, one way that you have been Jesus the Messiah, and one person that we can then share that good news with. And may we do it without fear and without shame. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

Talk:

- Which part of your story would help someone understand Jesus, not religion?
- Who in your life seems thirsty, tired, curious, or searching right now?

Action Plan:

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Share one part of your story this week with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus. Not doctrine. Not advice. Just: "Here's what I've seen Him do in my life."

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.