**INVITE EVERYONE**  
*John 4:27-42*

**T-minus three weeks and counting.** On September 7, *Open Door Sunday 14* launches with our new schedule: Connect Groups (aka Sunday School) and Classic Worship at 9:00; Connect Groups and Celebration Worship at 10:30. We’ve prayed, we’ve discussed, we’ve debated, we’ve fusssed, we’ve hashed it out, we’ve set the schedule, and three weeks from today … blast off!

Like any new adventure, there’s a mixture of excitement and apprehension as we near the launch. We all want to see if this baby will fly. The preparations have been solid: numerous new volunteers, wonderful cooperation concerning multiple use of classrooms, and many of you making this a daily matter of prayer.

For years our vision statement, our description of the church’s ministry has been captured in the phrase, “Called to care for God, for others, and for the world”—a Great Commandment, Great Commission kind of statement. But with the changes we’re making, it seemed right to revisit our statement. And you’ve been hearing the new vision statement since spring: “Invite everyone, invest in people, impact eternity for the glory of God”—“Invite, Invest, Impact” for short, and i³ for even shorter. That’s the name of the three-part series we begin this morning leading up to the launch on September 7: i³. Each Sunday, we’ll take one i, one piece of the statement, and flesh out what it looks like in practice. This Sunday: invite everyone.

I invite you to open your Bible to **John 4:27-42**. Our text is the conclusion of a lengthy conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman with whom he crossed paths at Jacob’s well just outside the Samaritan city of Sychar. The sun was high in the sky. It was the time of day when folks were seeking a little shade and reaching for their lunch pouch. Who knows? Maybe some bread and sardines, maybe some of last night’s lentils and a fig or two. It was time to eat. The disciples’ stomachs were rumbling, so they slipped into the farmers’ market in Sychar to rustle up a little food so they could fix lunch for themselves. Jesus was more weary than hungry. He didn’t go into Sychar. He stayed at the well to rest. Maybe He was leaning against the trunk of a tree, enjoying the shade. Perhaps He’d taken off his sandals and was rubbing his foot when a woman came to the well toting an empty water jar.
That was odd. Not the fact that a woman was coming to the well—fetching water was woman’s work in that culture. But that she came in the middle of the day when the sun was highest and the heat was hottest. The well in that culture was more than a village watering hole. It was a social gathering place, a female happy hour, an opportunity for the local ladies to chat about their lives and their husbands and their kids and whatever else was on their minds—the freshest news, the latest gossip, some new recipe one had tested the night before. It was Facebook with real faces and verbal conversation. And this lone lady who had come in the middle of the day to fetch her water chose not to be a part of all that socializing.

Maybe she’d tried and been rebuffed. Maybe on any number of days this lady had been the source of the gossip at the well: “You know what I heard about her? After five failed marriages she’s shacking up with a man she hasn’t even married! Oh, the shame!” Most people have a pretty good sense of when they’re not wanted. Maybe this woman tried social hour at the well. Maybe she heard the gossip, felt the stares, and not only got cold water but the cold shoulder as well. It was just better for everybody involved if she steered clear of the early morning happy hour and chose the no-one’s-there at noon hour.

But on this day, someone was there—a man no less, a Jewish man for Pete’s sake, and a man who was willing to break social norms and carry on a conversation with a woman in a public place.

“Give me a drink,” He said.

She did a bit of a double take. “What? Huh? A drink? Jewish men don’t ask Samaritan women for a drink. Jewish men aren’t even supposed to talk to Samaritan women.”

Jesus replied, “If you knew the gift of God and who you are talking to, you’d ask him for a drink and he would have given you living water. Drink that water and you’ll never thirst again.”

“I’d like some of that water,” she said. “I don’t want to be thirsty, and I get sick and tired of lugging water from the well to my house every day.”

Then, in what must have felt like a conversational detour, Jesus said, “Go get your husband.”
“Uh … I have no husband.”

“You’re right. Truth is: you’ve had five husbands and you’re not even married to the man you’re living with right now.”

“You must be a prophet,” she said, and promptly changed the subject from her lifestyle to the appropriate place to worship.

Jesus followed her line of conversation and told her that where we worship is not what matters. What matters is that true worshipers worship God in spirit and in truth wherever they are.

“Oh well,” she said, “when Messiah comes, he’ll set us straight on all these things.”

“Messiah has come,” Jesus said, “and I’m him.”

Now hear the rest of the story in the word of the Lord … (read the text).

I

**Picture the disciples with wide eyes and open mouths at the sight of Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman.** I wouldn’t be surprised if Philip dropped his armload of bread at the sight of it. They didn’t say anything, but their eyes were full of questions. And while Jesus talked to them about real food and a harvest of souls, the woman slipped away (her water jar left leaning against the well) and headed back into the village. This shame-drenched, reclusive woman became the town crier. “Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Messiah?”

Talk about getting a town’s attention. Everybody knew that this woman had done a lot. And if some man knew about all that, and if His knowledge emboldened her instead of chased her off, well, the townspeople had to see this man for themselves. A carpenter left his saw in a block of wood. A merchant yanked down a tarp to cover his stand. A woman took off her apron and gathered her children under her arms. A farmer left his mule and plow in the field. A group of kids playing tag stopped in their tracks. A few ladies talking in the street, looked at one another, and said, “Let’s go.” And many in the town followed the woman to the well, followed the woman to Jesus.
John tells us that “many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” It was pretty obvious, I guess, to most of the town’s folks that the woman who went out to the well was not the same women who came back from the well. Her step was lighter. Her eyes were brighter. Her cloak of shame had been traded for a jacket of joy. Something changed her. Someone changed her. And that someone was Jesus.

It’s pretty compelling when you see Jesus take a broken person and make her whole, take a drunk and make him sober, take a miser and make her generous, take a shameless sinner and make him holy. It gets your attention. It stirs curiosity. And it makes you wonder, “If Jesus could change her, maybe he could change me.”

So the woman’s change stirred the townspeople’s faith in Jesus. But once they spent a couple of days with Jesus, their faith wasn’t based on the woman’s testimony; it was based on their own interaction with Jesus. “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Great story!

II

The first i in our vision statement is “invite everyone.” While the woman at the well models this for us, notice that Jesus initiates the invitation process. “Give me a drink,” Jesus said to the woman. He started the conversation. He got the ball rolling. In light of the social customs of the day and the woman’s obvious reclusiveness, it’s safe to say that if Jesus hadn’t invited the woman to converse, she wouldn’t have said word one to Him. It wasn’t proper. She wasn’t looking for another man. For her it was about eyes forward, mouth shut. But Jesus opened his: “Give me a drink.” An invitation that led to a conversation that led to the woman inviting her whole town to come see Jesus.

That should come as no surprise to anyone who’s familiar with the Scripture. God has been starting conversations with people since the Garden of Eden: “Adam, where are you?”
• God tapped Abraham on the shoulder and invited him to follow God to Canaan and father a whole nation.

• God spoke to Moses through burning bush and invited him to lead God’s people from Egypt to the Promised Land.

• Through Isaiah the prophet: “Come, let us reason together, says the Lord” (1:18).

• Again through Isaiah: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (55:1).

• Jesus to Peter and John: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mk. 1:17).

• And in the Revelation: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (22:17).

God initiates the invitation. He is the first Inviter. He takes the first step, makes the first move. There was silence at the well that day, a silence broken by the invitation of Jesus: “Give me a drink.” A few simple words to begin a conversation, and a couple of days later, a lot of people in her town were saved. God initiates the invitation.

III

And once we respond, we get in on the inviting too. In our story, Jesus never told the woman to say anything to anybody. Maybe Jesus would have if the disciples hadn’t shown up and interrupted their conversation. In the New Testament, Jesus calls us to invite everyone. You remember the demon-possessed man Jesus healed at the cemetery in Gadarene? The healed man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus told him to go back to his village and tell people what the Lord had done for him and how the Lord had mercy on him (Mk 5:19).

And of course there are the various commissions Jesus gave to His followers:
• “Go and make disciples of all nations ...” (Mt. 28:19).

• “As the Father has sent me, so send I you” (Jn. 20:21).

• “And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ...” (Acts 1:8).

God calls us to get in on the inviting. While as far as we know from the text, Jesus never told the woman to go to her village and invite them to Him, it just seemed to her like the right thing to do. She couldn’t help herself. You read a good book, you want others to read it too. You see a good movie ... you eat at a good restaurant ... you go to a good church ... you naturally want to tell others about it, invite them to join in the joy. The Samaritan woman met a man who knew everything she did and loved her anyway. She was a changed person. She had to tell people about Him. That living water quenched her deepest thirst, gave her new life, and she wanted everyone to get a sip. She had to get in on the inviting.

IV

And the invitation is for everyone. Notice that the woman didn’t pick and choose who she would invite and who she wouldn’t. She wasn’t strategic. She didn’t target a particular demographic. And she didn’t intentionally not invite people who’d caused her pain.

• “That woman has been mean to me. I hope she dies in her sins.”

• “I’m not going to say a word to any of my ex-husbands. Those selfish jerks don’t deserve anything good like this to happen to them. No living water for them. I hope they drink poison.”

There was none of that. The woman just invited anybody and everybody. Now, there’s nothing wrong with inviting particular people so long as we never forget the invitation is for everyone—Jews, Samaritans, all nations, every person, everyone. Look who hoofed it from Sychar to the well to see Jesus. It’s safe to say there were rich and poor, educated and illiterate, known sinners and the deeply religious. The invitation is for everyone.
Jesus told a parable in Luke about a man who hosted a great banquet (14:15-24). He offered some specific invitations, all of which were turned down. The host was none too happy, and he told his servant to go out into the highways and hedges and invite anyone and everyone he could find. Good call—the gospel is for everyone.

Son invite whoever you want to invite—your friends, your family, whoever—but don’t forget on a broader scope to invite everyone you can whether you know them or not, whether you like them or not, whether you enjoy being around them or not. The invitation is for everyone. Jesus invited you. He’s got a cup of living water already waiting at your place at the table. And He stands ready to offer that same water to everyone who believes. Don’t set parameters on who you will invite or on whose worthy of the invitation. None of us are worthy. Invite everyone. The invitation is for everyone.

And the focus of the invitation is Jesus. Listen to the woman invite her village to Jesus: “Come see a man who told me all that I ever did.” The focus of our invitation is Jesus. Don’t share your faith—your faith may be faulty. Share Jesus. Point people to Jesus. Invite people to Jesus. Keep Jesus as the focus. “Come see a man ....”

It’s easy for us to make our story more important than Jesus. Your story is important. What Jesus has done for you, how Jesus has changed you is compelling, and God can use it. It’s obvious that the people of Sychar noticed a change in the woman’s life when she shared her invitation. Our stories can be powerful, convicting, encouraging. And no doubt somewhere in the process you will get to tell your story. But your story is not the focus of your invitation; Jesus is. The woman said, “Come see a man,” not “Come hear my story.”

It’s easy for us to make the plan of salvation the focus—the old VBS ABCs: admit you’re a sinner, believe Jesus died for you and rose again, commit yourself to follow Him. Listen to this plan. Believe this plan. Accept this plan. But the woman said, “Come see a man,” not “Come see a plan.”

It’s easy for us to focus on the church. “Come visit the church. You’ll like our church. The church has ministries for every age group. The church has great worship and good preaching. The church has nice facilities. The church has
friendly people. Come visit the church.” But the woman said, “Come see a man,” not “Come see the disciples.”

Don’t get me wrong. Sharing the plan of salvation is a good thing. Getting people to church so they can hear the gospel is a good thing. God uses these things to get people to Jesus. Just remember that Jesus is the focus of the invitation. We want to get everyone to Him.

VI

And once we get them to Jesus, He takes it from there. Our task is to invite, not convert. We do the inviting; Jesus does the converting. The famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody was doing a second crusade in a town he had visited a couple of years before. While there, a drunk approached him on the street and said, “Brother Moody, I want to thank you for saving me the last time you were in town.” Moody said, “Yeah, you look about like my work.” We can’t save. We can’t convert. But we can invite. That’s our task. Jesus takes care of the rest.

Sadly, not everyone we invite will come, and not everyone who comes will believe and trust and follow Jesus. John uses the adjective many to describe those who believed in Jesus after His two days with them in Sychar. The word is many, not all. We won’t bat 1.000. But we keep on swinging, keep on inviting because Jesus can save anybody—anybody. No case is too hard. No soul is out of His reach. He can save the morally upright and the worst reprobate in town. He can save the senior adult and He can save the child. He can save the philosophy professor and He can save the guy who cuts the shrubs. But the saving part is up to Him.

Our task is to invite everyone. And we mean everyone: the intellects and the GEDs, the broken and the put-together, the rich and the poor, the gay and the straight, the drug abuser and the health nut. Everybody needs the gospel. Invite everyone.

Because when we invite them to the church and get them to Jesus, Jesus is going to save some of them. Some of them, maybe even many of them will believe and trust and follow Jesus. Jesus will get people to himself. He’s good at this. He’s got millions already.
And at First Baptist Church, we want to be part of that process. We want to invite everyone.

VII

So ... will you invite everyone you can?

I’d like to think we’d all say yes. But somewhere in the room today, somebody is thinking ...

I just don’t see the big deal about inviting everyone. I can see why missionaries need to do this in other countries, but this is America and we’re in the Bible belt. Nobody can drive around our city and not pass ten or twenty churches. Flip channels on the TV and they’ll come across some Christian stations and hear all kinds of preachers. They’ve probably already heard the gospel, already been to somebody’s church, and if they’re not going now it’s because they just don’t want to and probably never will. If they want Jesus they know where to find us.

That all sounds well and good, but what if at the judgment, we stood side by side with people we know but never invited? And what if we had to watch their consignment to hell? And what if as they made the march to a dark eternity, one turned to you and said, “Why didn’t you tell me about Jesus? Why didn’t you at least invite to your church so I could have heard for myself?” I don’t think your response of “Hey, you lived in the Bible belt. You knew where the church was. You could have come any Sunday”—I don’t think that would sound as good to you then as it sounds to you now.

In truth, we are all responsible for what we do with Jesus. If a friend you never invited to Jesus rejects Him, God will hold your friend accountable for that rejection, not you. But if Jesus has touched your life like He touched the woman at the well, how can you keep the invitation to yourself? Our vision at First Baptist is to invite everyone: “Come see a man ....” Invite them to the church, invite them to Jesus, and maybe we’ll see a Sychar sequel in our own city, and many in Hot Springs will be saved!

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