



Message: ***Hanging On Too Tight!*** | March 8, 2026 | Speaker: Pastor Eddie Eddy

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: John 4:5-42 New International Version (NIV)

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, (Seeker) near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ 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.)

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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 to eternal life."

¹⁵ 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."

L: This is the word if God for the people of God. **P: *Thanks be to God.***

"Hanging on too tight!"

You know, one of my favorite things about preparing these sermons is how much I learn myself as I research these passages week after week. A new thing I learned this week is: This story of the woman at the well turns out to be the longest conversation Jesus ever had with a single person in the Gospels. He did a lot of teaching in front of big crowds and in the temple and at synagogues, but as far as a 1 on 1 conversation goes, Jesus spent the most time building a relationship...with a Samaritan woman who came to a well hanging on to a bucket and a lot of other baggage.

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In this story, our Samaritan woman has a past, a reputation that she can't let go of.

¹⁶ Jesus told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ 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."

This truth... is the baggage she's hanging on to. She has gone through 5 husbands and as she stands there in front of Jesus, she's living with another man who she hasn't married yet.

The story doesn't really tell us if she made the decision to leave her husbands or if they decided to cut her loose. In that day and age though, does it really matter; she is a woman, she is a possession, she carries no social value. But what she does carry, what she is hanging on so tightly that it weighs her down, is the shame associated with those broken relationships.

The shame she is hanging on to affects her life, it influences how she is living. She is hanging on so tight that she won't even go to the well early in the morning when most of the women would be there.

On my last day in the bush in Africa, we stayed in a village on the outskirts of the area we hunted in. We arrived in the evening, and they showed us where we would be sleeping. It was kind of like their version of a tiny little "Motel 6" right in the middle of the village.

The village came out in full force that evening. They performed a traditional hunter's dance for us with the drums and the chanting. It was pretty amazing and the village made us feel very welcome. This went on late into the night and we were ready for a good night's sleep. We thanked our host and we hit the rack.

First thing in the morning, right at sun rise we were awoken to the sound of the local women meeting at the well. They all had their big pots on their heads, and they were filling them with water from the foot pumped well to take back to their huts so they could start their day. They were chattering like a flock of guinea hens. Kids were running all over the place playing and everyone was having a great time.

When they all had filled their containers, they were off to work. A short time later came a woman on her own. She had a young child with her... maybe 7 or 8 months old. Her face was different from the other women. She had a very noticeable deformity that had to have been with her from birth, it was something that obviously made her different from the other women. So different that she wouldn't come to the well while everyone else was there.

She carried herself differently than all the women who had just left. There were no kids for her child to run around with. She had no one to help her lift her pot of water on to her head. She was different so she was an outcast and shunned in her village.

Because of the shame she hung on to, she felt that it was better if there was a barrier between her and the other village women. She tried to create some kind of safe zone or blockade between her and the judgement of others.

Our Samaritan woman at the well does the same thing. She erects barriers. As a matter of fact, she comes up with a bunch of barriers between her and Jesus as he meets her at the well.

We can do that too. We can hang on to things and then use them to create what we believe are safe barriers to protect us. Let's look at some of the barriers that our Samaritan woman erected and see if they are much different than the ones we hide behind.

First, this woman erected a barrier of prejudice. Jews and Samaritans had a long running hatred against one another. They were the Hatfields and McCoys of their day. The woman said, "Why are you, a Jew, asking me to get you a drink?" Her first response to Jesus was to express the bitterness that existed between Jews and Samaritans. She was hanging on too tight to a tradition of hostility and prejudice, so it created a wall between her and Jesus.

Do we do that? Do we look at other children of God and see the color of their skin? Do we reject people because of the way they worship? Do we "hang on so tight" to our cultural beliefs and personal causes that they become a barrier a protective wall that we use to keep us safe. When we do could we also be blocking out our ability to trust God?

God came to the Samaritan woman in the form of someone she saw as culturally unacceptable to her. God may come to us in the same way.

Another wall the woman tried to hide behind was the social custom at that time. Jewish men were not expected to interact with any women in public. A good, upstanding, righteous, Jewish male was only supposed to talk to his mother, his wives, or his 60 daughters, but never to any other women. The Samaritan woman called Jesus out on this; "How can you (a man) ask

me for a drink?" It was a social scandal for a Jewish man to talk to a strange woman. She let Jesus know that she was aware of the custom he was violating and she was hanging on to that.

Our social customs can separate us from people too. In our society, whether we want to admit it or not, we know we segregate by more than just race. We find all kinds of ways to set ourselves apart, we use education to separate us, where we live, gender, orientation, we separate by economic status as well.

Middle-class people tend to only know middle-class people. Rich people tend to hang out with rich people, and poor people, well they hang with other poor people. Social status and customs keep us apart.

Jesus, a Jewish man, a stranger to this Samaritan woman, spoke to her in public. She was hanging on to her social standards and separated herself from Jesus. Jesus may come to us as a stranger.

Jesus was an outsider for the Samaritan woman, and she recognized it right away. Jews did not normally travel through Samaria. They went out of their way to avoid Samaritans. To the woman, Jesus was an outsider in her community, an outsider to her way of life, and an outsider to her personal experience. Because she hung on to what was familiar to her, it was hard for her to understand and take Jesus seriously.

Jesus is often an outsider in our lives. We'd like to make Jesus like us, but he's not. He's different from us, beyond our comprehension different. The things he hangs on to, His values and ambitions, the way he conducted his life, the teaching he offered, and the people He cared for, the sacrifice he made, are so very different from what we are willing to do. Too many times, we find ourselves hanging on too tight to the things that separate us from Jesus and He remains an outsider to our way of life.

But if we choose to loosen our grip, to let go of some of the things that we hang on to so tightly, the things that separate us from others and from Jesus, maybe then, we too, will open ourselves to the living water Jesus is offering this woman.

Finally, one more thing our sister at the well was hanging on to was the guilt she carried from her past. She built a wall of secrecy to try to protect herself from her past. She came to the well alone, out of sight...out of mind. She wasn't ready to be completely honest with Jesus. Jesus said, "Go, call your husband and come back." and she answered, "I have no husband."

She didn't lie but she wasn't exactly telling the whole truth either. But Jesus knew the truth. She had been married five times and the man she was involved with now, well, he was one she was just kind of hanging on to at the time. She held that secret close to her chest, she didn't want Jesus to know the whole truth.

After all, he hadn't revealed who He was yet. She was protecting herself from the Messiah by hanging on to everything she could to separate herself from the truth. All the pain, all the trouble, all the mistakes, and all the heartaches of her life—she was "hanging on too tight", while at the same time, trying to hold Jesus at arm's length.

All Jesus wanted to do was offer her a release from her burdens. He wanted to **give** her something. Something that would free her from the weight that she hauled around day after day as she traveled back and forth to the well.

We do it too. We come here on Sunday mornings looking to get something out of church. We want to hear the organ, we want to see our friends, or maybe...we want our friends to see us here. Are we being completely honest when we come to the well? Are we "hanging on too tight" to our things that we forget to let go and be honest with Jesus?

The Samaritan woman struggled with that at first and so do we.

I've been thinking about these things we "hang on to" as we have been on this journey through Lent. This journey...that will bring all of us to the foot of the cross.

This story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well reminds me of the woman I met in Africa. She and I were as different as we could be: socially, racially, geographically, economically, physically, gender. Neither one of us felt welcome when the others were there. Yet at that well... we were both in need of the living water and we were both offered the living water.

And the same goes at the base of the cross, we are all loved by Christ.

If we are going to take this season of lent serious, if we are actually reflecting on what we need to make new in our lives, what we need to change, what needs die so we can be born again? If we are going to step out of the darkness and into the light, we need to be honest with ourselves and with Jesus. After all, what can we really hide from him anyway?

The woman at the well told her village, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did".

Be Honest! Is there something you know you need to let go of? Something that's leading you to say, I'm "hanging on too tight".

Is it a tradition, a social norm, a prejudice, a reputation, an organ or a building...is it a memory, is it some pain, some guilt, some shame? Maybe it's a desire to have control, or could it be greed? Are you afraid to let go and trust God to provide something so much better that will fill that emptiness that you try to hide and cling to so tightly.

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

This morning Jesus is standing here with us.

My hope and my prayer are that we can get past the barriers that get between us and Jesus.

To God be the Glory, Amen.

Closing Prayer & Dedication

Gracious God, as we offer You our gifts, our service, and our very lives, help us loosen our grip on anything that keeps us from trusting You fully. Take the things we've been hanging on to too tightly...our fears, our comforts, our assumptions, our need for control...and instead...place in our hands and hearts the living hope that only You can give.

Use these offerings, and use us, to bring grace to places of thirst, to bring kindness where walls have been built, and to bring healing where hearts have grown dry.

We dedicate all we have and all we are to You, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Next Steps:

- I will ask God to show me things I am holding too tightly to
- I will read through the Lenten Reading List this Lenten season