**Crossing the Street Series
Sermon 2: Meeting People Where They Are [Scott Pilgrim]**

John 4:1-38

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**Video version of this sermon:** https://vimeo.com/693806745
**Audio version of this sermon:** https://missioning.buzzsprout.com/1029217/10307947-sermon-meeting-people-where-they-are-scott-pilgrim-may-mission-month-2022

Hi, I'm Scott Pilgrim, the Executive Director of Baptist mission Australia. And it's great to share with you today as we journey together in our Crossing the Street series. Today, we focus on the theme Crossing the Street… Meeting People Where They Are.

Jennifer and Azita live only 100 meters apart, across the street from each other in suburban Brisbane. But the reality is their lives are far apart in terms of their backgrounds and the culture in which they've grown up. Jennifer spent all life growing up in suburban Brisbane, and Azita and her husband and children are refugees living in Australia from Iran. While their worlds are very different, innately they both yearn for friendship, belonging, community. The things that we all yearn for as human beings.

Jennifer has realised that there are barriers that have to be broken down for a genuine friendship to be built with the Azita. She's not looking for a quick fix. She's looking for a genuine friendship. And so over time, the ethnic, religious, cultural, even dietary barriers have been broken down one day at a time. Jennifer and Azita have built a beautiful friendship. Jennifer's husband and Azita’s husband have become friends, the kids play at each other's houses.

A genuine friendship has been formed across the street. Azita and her husband have started to come along to a Sunday afternoon Life Group and informal community gathering that happens in Jennifer's backyard. Jennifer is not seeking to change Azita’s religion. Jennifer is slowly and gently and intentionally seeking to draw her friend towards the good news, towards the hope of Jesus.

It's a beautiful story of what crossing the street really means, of what crossing the street in Jesus’ name means, of meeting people where they are. Just as Jennifer and Azita model that, their story could be replicated in communities across Australia today.

And we want to cheer on ordinary people in Baptist communities who've taken hold of the mission of God in their hands, God at work in their community, and are seeking to step out with courage and faith and passion and build relationships, meeting people where they are.

That's the heartbeat of the Baptist Mission Australia story. It's the heartbeat of who we are. People wanting to model the incarnation - God breaks into human history in the person of Jesus! And Jesus lives in a context and a culture. Jesus crosses the street. Jesus meets people where they are. And our workers are doing that in Africa, in Asia, in Outback Australian and Urban Australia, ordinary people humbly, passionately seeking to contextualise the good news, seeking to meet people where they are.

Like Susie and David in Malawi, getting to know local people, getting to know local traditions, going out with friends, to funerals, to feasts, understanding the culture, being good neighbours, seeking to bring support to people by word and deed.

People like Sally in Mozambique, coming alongside the young women in her culture, respectfully. Understanding the culture and the traditions, building relationship one day at a time, being invited to pray in Jesus’ name with Yawo women, helping them with issues in regard to health and the pandemic. Glenn and Liz in Thailand, on the ground with their kids, in a local community, meeting Thai people where they are, understanding the community and seeking to make a Jesus difference.

In John chapter four, we have a wonderful passage of Scripture, a template passage of Scripture, of what it means to meet people where they are in Jesus’ name. It's a rich passage for us as a mission community.

We take hold of this passage and ask ourselves, how do we model this in communities around the world. It's a deep and rich passage and I encourage you over a cup of coffee, a cup of tea to sit down and read it this week. There are many layers in it and I'm just going to scratch the surface today.

But we see Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman. It's interesting that this is one of the longest stories featuring a woman in the whole of Scripture. It's the longest Gospel conversation we have of Jesus speaking with anyone in the New Testament and it would be wrong to think it's the whole story. It's just part of the story, part of the conversation. It's a beautiful, challenging, often misunderstood story.

I remember as a kid hearing the story and thinking it was about, enemy territory - the Jews hated the Samaritans and here was this sinful woman. But it's not about that. It's ultimately a grand love story. It's ultimately a love story, as a desperate woman, as a woman in need, as a woman who's been shunned, as a woman who seeks peace and hope, and belonging, and community - innately all the things that you and I seek after everyday - as that woman encounters the life transforming, non judgmental, compassionate, love of God. It's a love story.

We say at Baptist Mission Australia, why do we do what we do? Because nothing matters more than sharing God's love with the world. And it's a mission story. It's a mission story. Because as this woman's life is transformed, she becomes the insider. This Samaritan woman, the most unlikely, she becomes the woman who takes the good news back to her village, who shares her story, who lives it out, who sees other people become disciples.

And so there is a discipling movement in that local community. And it begins with this woman. It begins with the insider, the most unlikely. It's a grand love story. It's a mission story. And it's a story where Jesus models what it means to cross the street and meet people where they are. Jesus has to travel and he has to travel through Samaria. And yes, in the culture of the day for the Jews, the Samaritans were an ostracised people. They were seen as second class citizens. They were pushed to the margins. They were ridiculed. They were seen as dogs by the Jews.

Jesus, He breaks the first kind of traditional cultural barrier. Some Jews would spend days travelling so they didn't have to go through this area. But Jesus immerses himself. He engages in Samaria. For the Jews, it may have been enemy territory. But for Jesus, for God, here were people who needed to be loved and esteemed, and upheld with the same dignity as other human beings. Let's remind ourselves that Jesus doesn't call us into enemy territory, He calls us into new territory, He calls us, at times, into uncomfortable territory, but God is already at work there, loving people and responding to the needs of people in the community.

And so Jesus already breaks one barrier, and then He comes to the well. He's physically thirsty. A beautiful picture of the real Jesus, fully God but fully human. He's tired, He's thirsty. He's walked a long way. He sits down at a will, and He wants a drink.

I recently was up on holidays in northern New South Wales, and there was a long coastal hike that I'd been wanting to do. My wife dropped me at the start of the hike and off I went. And a few minutes into the hike, I realised I'd forgotten my water bottle, an essential hiking item. I’d forgotten to bring water, but I so wanted to do this hike. So I hiked for more than half a day. My wife met me at the end. And my first words to my wife were “Water!” I wanted a drink. I was thirsty. And you know what it's like, when you're thirsty. You know what it's like to suddenly taste cold water in your mouth, to be refreshed.

Jesus was thirsty. But He was about to have an encounter with this Samaritan woman, to share with us something much deeper. To highlight that He meets our inner thirst, our spiritual thirst, our innate thirst for love and forgiveness and for hope and purpose and meaning in our lives. That He comes with living water to meet the deepest thirst in our life.

It may be today you're listening to this message and you're not in a personal relationship with Jesus, you'd like to find out more about what a relationship with Jesus looks like. Can I encourage you to chat with people in your community, people around you. Jesus comes today to meet your innate needs, your deepest needs.

And so the woman comes to the well. She comes to the well at lunchtime around the middle of the day. That was a cultural no no. Women came to the well at dusk, or dawn, but she comes in the middle of day, it seems, so others don't see. It seems that she's been pushed to the edges, she was living in isolation. She comes with a sense of insecurity to the well.

And then Jesus, a Jewish man begins a conversation with her, a Samaritan woman. A number of barriers are pushed aside, there are a number of bridges built, a number of cultural traditions smashed down by Jesus as he engages in conversation with a Samaritan and a woman.

Jesus has come to bring in the new Kingdom, Jesus has come to break down barriers, Jesus has come to build bridges, to forge genuine relationships, and He sends us out in our communities to do the same. And so then a conversation begins. So often, we can lead others towards the hope of Jesus when we begin ordinary conversations, when we meet people where they are - at a playgroup, on a basketball court, in our school community, at work, as we engage with people in need in our local community, as we open our eyes to see who is God put into our sphere of influence. Never lose sight of the power of ordinary conversations, as we seek to build relationship.

And a conversation takes place and this woman can hold her own. They talk ethnicity, they talk gender, they talk theology, they talk liturgy. There's a rich conversation and Jesus is happy to engage in all of those things. But ultimately, they all become barriers that Jesus wants to break down because Jesus core interest is the heart of this woman. He wants to hear the woman's deepest needs. He wants to know this woman's hopes and aspirations and dreams. He wants to understand more of this woman's sorrows and fears and disappointments, a God who meets us where we are today. And so conversation flows.

What do we read in the Scriptures, the woman says, “I know the Messiah is coming, the one who is called Christ, when He comes, He will explain everything to us.” John four verse 25. And then Jesus speaks to her, “I am that Messiah, I am the Messiah, I am the one you've been looking for. I am the one who can meet your deepest needs. I am the one who can offer you living water.”

It's interesting, if we look at this passage, that at the well, in the culture of the day, there wasn't a bucket there, you actually bought your own bucket. And if we look at this passage, Jesus arrives, He's been walking for a long time and He hasn't got a bucket with him. He needs to use the woman's bucket, an unclean bucket. But as He does that, as He engages with this woman in the physical world, He's painting that much deeper spiritual picture, that we all can engage with Jesus, that Jesus can meet all our needs, and that He offers you and I living water.

He meets our deepest needs, and He invites us to be His hands and feet in a broken world. To cross the street like Jennifer does in reaching out to her friend, like our workers do around the world, like Cam, who tells the story recently of walking 10 kilometres to meet one of his Yawo mates.

Cam an ordinary Aussie man who has felt the call of God upon his life to live in the back blocks of Mozambique, and there's Cam walking to sit with his mate. Over a long period of time, a relationship has developed, a genuine relationship, and they can talk life. On this particular day, Cam walks to meet the man with his Bible translation of Luke's Gospel. This man has heard about God, but he wants to know more about this prophet. He wants to know more about this one called Jesus who's seen very differently in his culture. He wants to know more about this Jesus and the change that Jesus can bring to his life.

And Cam walks to the village to sit down with his man but he realizes as he gets there that the man’s hard work, sweating away, making mud bricks, building a new kitchen for a family member. What does Cam do? Cam puts down the Scriptures. He rolls up his sleeves. And he says to his mate, “I'm here to help you.” And together he gets his hands dirty with red clay. And he builds bricks, and they build this kitchen together.

And as Cam says, nothing better than two men working together to have a genuine and real conversation about life. They talk about family. They talk about their different cultural backgrounds, and Jesus naturally comes into the conversation and this man like the Samaritan woman He wants to know more. He's thirsty. He's thirsty. He yearns for genuine hope in his life. He wants to be a better husband. He wants to be a better father. It's a different world, a different culture very far away from us. But he's a man with some of the same innate needs that I and you live with.

And there is Cam. And what is Cam doing? Cam is crossing the street. Cam is meeting someone where he is. Cam is getting his hands dirty, building mud bricks to build a kitchen for a friend. And he does all of that in Jesus’ name. And through conversation, and through relationship, and through breaking down barriers one day at a time. Together, as Australian Baptists, we have the opportunity of sharing the hope of Jesus by word and deed with people who otherwise might never hear the good news in a way that makes sense to them. It's a beautiful story.

I love Jennifer's story, as she crosses that 100 metres. But as she intentionally and courageously builds bridges, forwards relationships, and brings the hope of Jesus to her neighbours. I love the story of the Samaritan woman, a life that is transformed. And then with her life transformed, Jesus encouraged her to go back into her community to go back into her village.

People know her story, but her life is different now. She's met the one with living water, she begins to share the hope of Jesus and so many in the community want to know more. The outsider becomes the insider, one of the least likely is invited by Jesus to be the disciple maker, to be the apostle in her community.

In another story in the Gospels, we see the demon possessed man has healed by Jesus. Jesus is getting on the boat and the demon possessed man who is now clean and free, who has met the living water says, “I want to come with you.” And what does Jesus say? “No, go back into your village. Go back into your village. Go back and let people see who you are. You become the disciple maker. You take my hope, you cross the street, you go back into your community.”

Can I invite you today to prayerfully consider, what's your street? What's your street look like? What's your local community? What's your sphere of influence? Where is God already at work in your life? Who are the people God has already put into your world that you might begin a conversation with, that you might forge a deeper relationship with, that you might break down barriers, that you might build bridges, that you might meet people where they are embodied the good news of Jesus by word and deed.

Let me finish today with a wonderful story of the four men who bring their paralysed mate to Jesus on a mat. I love this story. Here are four men, and they desperately want to get their friend to Jesus. They desperately want to see this man healed. They've heard about Jesus. They haven't done Alpha, but they know that this Jesus is a special man and they want to get their friend to Him.

And of course, you know the story, when they get to the house where Jesus is, it’s so crowded, it is so packed, no COVID restriction rules in place here! It's so packed. They can't get in, they can't even get through the door. They could have given up. And so often we allow barriers to get in the way. So often we think mission, reaching out to others is hard work because we make it hard work. I have to stop and remind myself it's not about me. God is already at work. He calls me simple to be courageous and faithful and obedient and trust Him as I build relationships with others.

What happens? The men look up and creatively, they decide to make a hole in the roof and lower their friend to Jesus. And people are amazed. And Jesus is amazed. And He honours their collaborative, innovative, imaginative, bold faith.

Mark Holt, one of the giants in Baptist Mission Australia, loves to take hold this story. I remember having coffee with him as I first started working in this mission community, and he said, “Scott, at Baptist Mission Australia, we're about coming through the roof. We're about breaking down barriers in Jesus’ name. We're about living as good neighbours and finding the way in, finding how we can share the love and hope of Jesus in ways that make sense. We're about getting through the ceiling. We're about getting our friends to Jesus. And hey Scott, we do it together. We do it together.”

We do it in partnership with you as Australian Baptists across our movement. Thanks for sharing in the Crossing the Street series. We're praying for you and your local faith community, cheering you on. As you step out, as you cross streets. Will you pray for us? Will you pray for our workers? Might you consider generously supporting the work we do around the worlds in Jesus’ name on behalf of our movement?

You can find out more at www.baptistmissionaustralia.org

Thanks for sharing in this message today. Let's take hold of this beautiful story, this love story, this mission story and then tomorrow, and the next day and the day after, keeping crossing the street, that we might help others journey towards Jesus. God bless you.