

Look, Lift Up Your Eyes, and See!

An Adaptation of the *Other* Story in John 4
For 8-12 Readers

By Justin Rossow

Cast:

NARRATOR 1

NARRATOR 2

JESUS

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

THE DISCIPLES (INCLUDING PETER, JAMES, JOHN; AND 3-4 OTHERS, IF POSSIBLE)

RABBI ELIEZER

THE AUDIENCE, *that is*, A CROWD OF SAMARITANS (EVERYONE ELSE)

THE DIRECTOR (*if needed*)

Note: If you are presenting this without much (or any) rehearsal, have THE DIRECTOR read all of the stage directions out loud, gesturing to places like “downstage center.” The actors respond accordingly. Keep the flow moving forward.

[All the characters begin seated in the AUDIENCE. NARRATORS 1&2 are seated in the front row. They make eye contact, stand, and take their positions downstage center.]

NARRATOR 1: As human beings, our natural, fallback position is a *defensive posture*. We naturally want to *defend ourselves* from things that are new, strange, or different.

NARRATOR 2: *A posture of discovery*, in contrast, goes against our default setting to embrace the new, the strange, or the different as a kind of opportunity. You can see the difference between *discovery* and *defense* in the story *that surrounds the story* of the Woman at the Well.

NARRATOR 1: *[making introductions]* My guess is that you are at least somewhat familiar with Jesus *[indicating JESUS, who stands from his position in the AUDIENCE]* and the Samaritan woman at the well *[indicating THE SAMARITAN WOMAN, who also rises.]*

[As JESUS and THE SAMARITAN WOMAN make their way to center stage and pose in a frozen scene, or tableau, facing each other but open to the audience.]

NARRATOR 2: *[taking up a position downstage right]* If you haven’t heard the story of the Woman at the Well recently, check it out! It’s one of my favorites! You’ll find it in the Gospel of John, chapter 4.

NARRATOR 1: [*taking up a position downstage left*] But the story we are telling today is about the disciples just *before* and just *after* Jesus meets the woman at the well. It really drives home the importance of *seeing things differently*. This *other* story in John 4 is easy to miss, partly because it comes to us in bits and pieces, mostly by way of parenthetical statements.

NARRATOR 2: In John 4, verse 7, we find Jesus [*indicating JESUS*] all alone, asking a Samaritan woman [*indicating THE SAMARITAN WOMAN*] for a drink.

[*JESUS raises his upstage arm with an open hand to THE SAMARITAN WOMAN, silently asking for a drink; their tableau freezes again*]

NARRATOR 1: [*Drifting downstage center to interrupt the scene*] In parentheses, John tells us that the disciples [*NARRATOR 1 lifts a hand to signal the DISCIPLES to rise where they are seated in the audience; the DISCIPLES stand; NARRATOR 1 keeps hand lifted*] had all gone into the nearby Samaritan town [*NARRATOR 1 turns hand over and motions down to signal the DISCIPLES to be seated; DISCIPLES sit*] to buy food.

The fact that they are *buying food* is actually an important detail, because of something that shows up in the next verse... [*NARRATOR 1 clears downstage center and returns to downstage left, out of the way of the scene*]

NARRATOR 2: The woman is shocked that Jesus, a Jew, would ask a Samaritan like her for anything, let alone a drink of water.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: [*breaking tableau*] I am shocked, shocked I tell you!

[*Tableau freezes again: JESUS has an open hand raised, asking for a drink; THE SAMARITAN WOMAN is stuck in her expression of shock. During the course of the following narration, JESUS and THE SAMARITAN WOMAN slowly start listening and relax their tableau, but they will snap back into their frozen position at the right moment.*]

NARRATOR 1: [*Again drifting downstage center to interrupt the scene*] Again in parentheses, the Gospel writer notes that Jews [*from their seat in the audience, the DISCIPLES cheer!*] and Samaritans [*DISCIPLES boo!*] don't associate at all, if they can help it. [*NARRATOR 1 begins to return downstage left, thinks better of it, and returns center stage to explain to the audience*] OK; New Testament Greek doesn't actually use parentheses—or punctuation marks of any kind—but translations usually put those details in parentheses, because they are clearly side comments that break up the thought flow... [*Noticing this monolog has broken up the thought flow*] Kind of like this... [*NARRATOR 1 smiles apologetically and returns to downstage left, out of the way of the scene*]

NARRATOR 2: [*to the audience*] Maybe you know that Jews [*DISCIPLES cheer!*] and Samaritans [*DISCIPLES boo!*] shared a common history and culture up to a point; they also shared a common animosity that made a detour around Samaria [*DISCIPLES boo!*] the first choice for most traveling Jews [*DISCIPLES cheer!*]. [*to the DISCIPLES, in exasperation*] Oh, would you knock it off?! [*DISCIPLES are mollified*]

NARRATOR 2: To say these *neighbors*

NARRATOR 1: (and distant relatives)

NARRATOR 2: *hated* each other

NARRATOR 1: (with good reason)

NARRATOR 2: would not be putting it too strongly.

Because Samaritans often looked and sounded like Jews,

NARRATOR 1: (there is no rivalry like an in-state rivalry)

NARRATOR 2: it was important to keep the distinction as clear as possible.

NARRATOR 1: One of these distinctions had to do with *food laws*: what and *how* you are supposed to eat.

NARRATOR 2: Again, you may already know that Jews don't eat pork, but did you know that the Old Testament laws (and additional interpretations and extensions of those laws) include a bunch of other rules and regulations about food and food preparation?

NARRATOR 1: The focus on purity and identity was so important that even food cooked by a Samaritan could be taboo; food laws were a clear line in the sand that could keep Jews distinct from their rival neighbors.

NARRATOR 2: Only a hundred years or so after Jesus, as the debate over insider and outsider behavior was in high swing, one rabbi reportedly held the position that:

RABBI ELIEZER: [*stands to speak loud and clear, with authority and an upraised finger, but no accent*] "Whoever eats bread baked by Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of a pig." [RABBI ELIEZER *sits back down*]

NARRATOR 1: So when the disciples [*giving the DISCIPLES the signal to rise; the DISCIPLES stand up*] went into a Samaritan village to get lunch, they were in enemy-occupied territory [*DISCIPLES start sneaking from their positions in the audience to make their way safely behind NARRATOR 1, down stage left*]. They were on a reconnaissance mission to find the only kosher deli in town, as if their Jewish identity depended on it—because it did! The disciples were definitely a product of their culture. [*By this time, the DISCIPLES have safely gathered behind NARRATOR 1*] In a different scene, recorded in the Gospel of Luke, a similar Samaritan village didn't welcome Jesus because he was a Jew on his way to Jerusalem. James and John had a rather aggressive response:

JAMES: [*to NARRATOR 1, pointing to the audience*] Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?

JOHN: [*gleefully, with appropriate explosive hand gesture*] KABOOM!

NARRATOR 2: Yeah. The disciples were definitely a product of their culture, so when they got back from their top secret lunch mission [*the DISCIPLES make their way upstage and approach JESUS from upstage left*] and saw Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman...

[*The DISCIPLES stop on their way to JESUS; NARRATOR 2 notices JESUS and THE SAMARITAN WOMAN aren't frozen anymore, so stops; when the narration stops, JESUS and THE SAMARITAN WOMAN snap back into their frozen tableau: JESUS has his hand open and raised; THE SAMARITAN WOMAN is frozen in an expression of shock; NARRATOR 2 starts the sentence over and then narration continues*]

NARRATOR 2: When the disciples get back and see Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman, they all are aghast.

DISCIPLES: [*all together, to audience*] We are aghast! [*The DISCIPLES freeze in tableau behind JESUS, but open to the audience, mirroring THE SAMARITAN WOMAN'S expression of shock.*]

[*During the following, JESUS and the DISCIPLES return to a frozen tableau after they have said their lines or done their part; it's like playing and pausing a moving to catch particular scenes.*]

NARRATOR 1: [*admires the scene for a moment*] After the Samaritan woman had gone back into town ... [*ALL relax tableau; SAMARITAN WOMAN returns to her seat*] the disciples offer Jesus the kosher meal they brought back to him ... [*PETER pantomimes offering Jesus food*] When Jesus refuses ... [*JESUS holds up hand to refuse*] they must have been confused.

DISCIPLES: [*all together, to audience*] We are so confused!

NARRATOR 1: But when Jesus says:

JESUS: I have food you know nothing about.

NARRATOR 1: the disciples must have gone into full panic mode!

DISCIPLES: [*all together, to one another*] Panic mode: Abbbh!!!! [*DISCIPLES run around, going into brief, but vocal, panic mode... DISCIPLES stop and regain their composure as a group, returning to confused tableau*]

NARRATOR 2: Jesus is actually talking about “doing God’s will” as a kind of food that nourishes the soul.

JESUS: My food is doing the will of the one who sent me.

NARRATOR 2: “Doing God’s will” means bringing Good News, even to Samaritans. But when Jesus talks about “*a different kind of food,*” all the disciples can hear is dangerous talk about eating habits that could make Jesus “unclean.”

DISCIPLES: [*move downstage center, between the NARRATORS, and huddle together so JESUS can’t hear, then murmur to each other in disturbed confusion*]

PETER: [*loudly, above the murmuring pack*] Did someone *else* bring Jesus lunch before we got back?? [*DISCIPLES freeze in huddle tableau*]

NARRATOR 1: These disciples aren’t worried about potluck etiquette. In their worldview, if Jesus had eaten a piece of bread from that woman they just saw, it would have been like finding Jesus grilling some pork chops or finishing a bacon double cheeseburger!

NARRATOR 2: Maybe even worse!

NARRATOR 1: Into the midst of that fear, Jesus speaks. [*JESUS approaches the huddled DISCIPLES down stage center and takes a breath to address the disciples, but freezes before he speaks.*]

NARRATOR 2: Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman [*indicating THE SAMARITAN WOMAN*] had returned to her town and shared some surprising news:

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: [*stands from her seat in the audience and says to the people around her, indicating JESUS*] Come with me and see a man who told me everything I ever did! He couldn’t be the Messiah, could He? [*THE SAMARITAN WOMAN fixes her eyes on JESUS and remains standing.*]

NARRATOR 2: At the very moment this hated Samaritan woman arrives back on the scene, bringing with her even more hated Samaritans [*indicating the audience*] so they could meet their Savior [*indicating JESUS*], Jesus says to his closest followers:

JESUS: [*takes a breath again and says to the DISCIPLES as they break their frozen huddle*] Look; lift up your eyes, and see! [*indicating the audience*] The fields are white for harvest!

[*JESUS and the DISCIPLES again freeze in tableau, JESUS smiling at the audience; the DISCIPLES looking somewhat confused at the audience, like they are surprised to see them there*]

NARRATOR 2: Harvest means bringing in valuable grain. Harvest means giving thanks at the completion of time and labor. Harvest means taking what was once *outside* and joyfully bringing it *in*. Harvest: that’s how Jesus wants his followers recalibrate their worldview.

NARRATOR 1: The disciples look and see only cultural enemies and purity boundary infractions; Jesus sees harvest and offers living water. No wonder Jesus has to say it three times!

JESUS: [*counting to three on his fingers, but not saying the numbers*] (1) Look! (2) Lift up your eyes! (3) And see! See things differently! Drop your defensive posture, and discover something new!
[*making an appeal to the audience*] See things the way I do!

[*The DISCIPLES make a circle around JESUS, as if they are listening to him teach; JESUS turns away from the audience as he is teaching his DISCIPLES*]

NARRATOR 2: Jesus is still calling his followers to move from a natural *defensive posture* to a *posture of discovery*.

NARRATOR 1: The disciples were concerned about defending Jesus from the defiling food of outsiders. [*The DISCIPLES, still in their circle around Jesus, turn outward and take a defensive posture, fists raised, glaring at the audience.*] But Jesus wanted them to discover the satisfying food of doing God's gracious will, and bringing Good News to people on the outside.

[*JESUS wades through the circle of the DISCIPLES and extends his hands to the audience with a smile. The DISCIPLES look confused. JESUS takes THE SAMARITAN WOMAN'S hand. She smiles back at him. As THE SAMARITAN WOMAN pantomimes introducing JESUS to other audience members, JESUS shakes their hands. JESUS, THE SAMARITAN WOMAN, and the DISCIPLES slowly return to their seats. PETER lags behind the other DISCIPLES.*]

NARRATOR 2: [*While the DISCIPLES are getting settled—without shaking any hands (yet)*]
Only much later did the disciples understand that Jesus had declared all food to be clean.
NARRATOR 1: Even then, it took some divine intervention... In Acts 10, Peter has a vision:

PETER: [*Who has not yet reached the audience, speaking to the heavens in a vision:*] No, Lord! I would never eat any of those unclean animals in that sheet! Wait ... what? Take and eat? But only Gentiles ... oh!!! I get it! If the *food* is clean, the *people* are clean, and I can share the Good News with those who aren't like me!
[*The vision ends; PETER smiles at the audience, shakes a hand or two, and returns to his seat*]

NARRATOR 2: But already back in John chapter 4, these very Jewish disciples [*DISCIPLES cheer!*] are willing to walk with Jesus into what feels like enemy-occupied territory and spend three whole days in a village they would have much preferred to avoid. [*DISCIPLES are by this time all seated; NOW they smile and shake hands with the people around them in the audience, making, "Hi! How you doin'?" noises.*]

NARRATOR 1: By the third day, these previously hated Samaritans [*DISCIPLES look quickly at each other and then cheer!*] profess personal faith in Jesus as *their* Messiah, too. That's something the disciples never would have guessed ahead of time.

[JAMES and JOHN *stand suddenly, together*]

JAMES: We never would have guessed that!

NARRATOR 1: In fact, by the time we get to Acts chapter 8, Peter and John call not *fire*, but the *Holy Spirit* down from heaven on a group of Samaritan believers!

JOHN: [*with "mind blown" hand gesture*] *KABOOM!*

[JAMES and JOHN *sit*]

NARRATOR 2: But moving from *defense* to *discovery* means being open to what Jesus is doing, even when it goes against our expectations.

[NARRATORS 1 & 2 *move together to take center stage*]

NARRATOR 1: [*addressing the audience*] How about you? Where do you see Jesus on the move, doing something you would never have guessed ahead of time? How often do you look for Jesus active in your life, or wonder what the Spirit is shaping in the lives of the people around you?

NARRATOR 2: Does your workplace, or school, or community feel *kind of scary* for a person of faith? Does the unknown of your neighbor or your coworker awaken *a defensive posture* in your heart? Do the customs and priorities of the people around you make you feel like an *outsider*? I think that's probably normal. But I also think Jesus would invite you to move from *defense mode* to *discovery mode*.

NARRATOR 1: Jesus is already up to something in the lives of the people around you, even in the lives of people who are *least like* you (and therefore the *most threatening* to you). Jesus is at work, doing the will of his Father. You have the opportunity to wonder what Jesus is doing, and to discover what he is going to do next.

NARRATOR 2: The invitation to follow Jesus is the beginning of an adventure that can put you outside your comfort zone at times.

NARRATOR 1: But you also get to see some amazing things take place along the way.

[With a smile to each other, NARRATORS 1&2 *go back to their seats*]

Finis.