

## **THE BON AIR PULPIT**

*James Pardue, Pastor*

**January 14, 2001**

**Scripture: *John 4:28-30***

**Sermon: *Come, See the Man***

It is indeed a joy to have Mr. Martin with us today to be able to dedicate our gift of a piano. People had saved for many years and we were able last year to be able to purchase our new console for the organ. We have deliberately waited to place that in its proper position over here until after Christmas music and this celebration today. But we hope in the next few weeks that work will begin on that and within a month that, that will be placed there and we are grateful for people who have contributed year by year to get that and then the gracious gift to be able to have the new piano and we are very grateful to look forward to this afternoon to have the celebration together.

There was a man who was an amateur antique collector. One of his joys was to go out on the week-ends and to find hidden treasures. He looked for those things that people really didn't realize the value and then he would buy them cheaply and sell for a profit and that's the way he made much of his living. One week-end he was out in the country looking for antiques and he stopped at a small country store. It was one of those kind of stores where they had almost every thing that you wanted and in the middle of it was an antique, old wood stove and he noticed the cat licking its milk by the stove. His trained eye looked down and realized that the bowl that the cat was using was very, very valuable. And he began to think that old man who owns this store doesn't know that,

that is a priceless bowl. And so he began to conjure in his mind how he could buy the bowl real cheaply. He said, "I hate cats, but maybe if I bought the cat, I could get the bowl," so he went over to the man and said, "I see this cat and it's a beautiful cat and I wanted to know if you would like to sell it," and the old man without missing a beat in his rocking chair said, "Well, I'm in the selling business if I've got it and you got a price I'll give it to you." So the man dreamed up some outrageous figure and said, "Is that enough for your cat" and he said, "Oh very much for it" and so the man almost with disgust reached down to pick up the cat saying again I hate cats and he said, "You know your cat is really going to miss you, he is really going to miss being with you and one of the things that maybe might help him to be more comfortable is if I took the bowl that he is used to drinking out of, if I took that home." So with the cat in his arm, he reached down for the bowl and the old man said, "You leave that bowl alone." That's the best cat seller bowl I've ever had.

There are a lot of people in life that reach for bowls and end up with cats. There are a lot of people who think they've got it all worked out and they are going to be able to get what they want and all of a sudden they end up with something that makes them miserable. In the fourth chapter of John, if you would describe the woman that Jesus is having a conversation with, that probably could describe her, she reached for a bowl and ended up with a cat. When she was a young girl she stood in front of her family and friends and the Jewish Rabbi in her small village and she celebrated her marriage. One day her husband came in and the tradition of the time was that women had no legal rights and all that a man had to do was to come in and say three times I divorce you, and she had to pack up what little she had and leave, she had no division of property, no recourse, she was out on the street, and that happened to her. All of her dreams collapsed, she fell in love again, same thing happened, it happened five times and she became

so discouraged about life, she was kind of what the old song said, she was sick of living, scared to die and finally she just gave up on marriage altogether and she finally started living with another man. Jesus knew about her, went out of his way on one of His trips where He would have the opportunity to talk with her. Not only did she feel rotten on the inside about herself, everybody in the small village felt that she was the talk of the town because the story actually says that she's out drawing water at twelve o'clock and women in Bible times that was the first thing they did in the morning, it was hot and clammy and you don't want to go out and pull up water and put it on your head and walk to your village in the middle of the day. But in the middle of the day, there she was, obviously symbolizing the fact that none of the other ladies wanted to be around her as she didn't want to be around any of them. She was tired of hearing what they said. And Jesus began to talk to her. Jesus began to say to her, *you know isn't this terrible to have to come out here and draw up water. I mean every day to put down your bucket and pull up water and then at the end of the day you don't have enough water for tomorrow and you've got to come back and pull up more water. I know this is a hard job.* She said, "It's terrible." He said, "*What would happen if somebody would give you an artesian well, the kind of well that just bubbled up and you wouldn't have to come out here to the well and draw.*" She said, "The greatest gift I can imagine." And then Jesus began to talk about her in her spirit (?) and he said, "*I know what you've been doing all of your life. You've been trying to change the circumstances hoping that you could find life and if I could describe you, you are letting down buckets and pulling them up and then you keep running out and in spite of everything that you do, you are still thirsty and you are still lonely. Let me tell you what I want to do for you. I want to place inside of you a kind of life that just keeps bubbling up, a kind of life that meets every experience of life, a kind of life that's there in the dry times and*

*in the good times, the kind of life that even if everything around you isn't going well life on the inside is going well. That's what I would like to place in you* and the woman said, "Oh, oh I don't know who you are but give it to me." Jesus then helped her to understand who He was.

And then I wanted to read to you the passage of scripture for us today from the fourth chapter of John. It says this, then leaving her water jar the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come see a man that told me everything I did." This man is the Christ. And they came out of the town and they made their way towards her. Let me tell you what happened to her. When she gave her life to Christ that well on the inside, that joy, that satisfaction, that peace, began to be evident in her life immediately and the first thing, the first thing she thought about was I need to run into town and tell other people about this man. Nobody told her to do it, nobody said you have to do it, nobody laid a guilt trip on her, she just said, "I've got to do it." And she went running back in.

Now you have to understand the culture. In Bible times women did not speak in public. There is actually an incident where a man returned after being in a war, coming back to his home, met his wife in the street, she spoke publicly to her husband, hugged and kissed him. She was taken to court and punished. I mean when you read this passage of scripture and it says she goes running down the middle of town. And she is saying, "I've found Him, I've found Him, I've found the Christ," and the amazing thing, a miracle, all of those people who had been, you know, like little kitty cats talking about her and all the men who didn't want to be seen around them because you know their wives may have said, "What are you doing talking to her." Every

one of them said she's found something, let's go out and see it for ourselves.

Now one of the things that is true of every person who comes to Christ is that they find in their selves some kind of joy so deep, so overwhelming that it just bubbles up and they want to talk about it to somebody else. They don't have to have a seminary degree, they don't have to have a course, it's just something inside of them that in it's normal state, they just want to share with somebody what they have.

When I moved to Richmond thirteen years ago, I had not been in town a day until somebody said, "Did you know that we have one of the best grocery stores in the world right here in Richmond." I said, "You do." They told me, "I'm not going to tell its name if you haven't got it figured out, you are not from here." The brothers didn't give me any money for this part of the sermon, so I won't mention them. I kept records and in the first thirty days people told me about that grocery store forty seven times. I went out of sheer curiosity.

I saw a girl the other day who is a member of our congregation. I said, "How are you doing?" "Fine" If I had some serious disease and I had been miraculously cured and you were my friend and I went to you and I said you know you've had the same thing I've had, I can't tell you this doctor has discovered some new medicine and he's giving it to me and I'm cured and you are my friend, I want you to go the same doctor I saw. All three of those illustrations you find very normal, but when I come to you and say the greatest thing you ever found was Jesus Christ, isn't it unusual that you and I find it strange to say anything about Him. But when you read in the Bible what these people did was that they met Him and they just did it. Now I know what you are saying. Well I know but Pastor He couldn't use me. I mean people would think it's strange if I said something. What about this woman, you could

not pick for her day anybody any stranger. She wasn't cut out of anybody's cloth, but because she went and said something, there was something about her that they said if it's true for her maybe I ought to go check it out. And it may be that you have been so out of sorts with God, that if God comes into your life and you share it, people may say, "Well, my goodness if He can do something for him maybe I ought to go and check it out for me.

God uses all kinds of folk but what He uses are people whose lives have changed and they have the opportunity to go and share about it. The story says that she became so excited she even forgot what she came for. She left her water pots and went running back in. The water pot really wasn't to important anymore. What she had found was.

I wanted to ask you this morning are there some water pots in your life that maybe you need to set aside to where you would be able to go and share what God has done with you? Maybe, maybe its giving up playing golf four times a week and maybe just playing it a couple of times, maybe you would have more time. One of the men in our congregation came to me last week. I know, I have an idea of kind of money he makes. He said, "I want to tell you, I want to give up my water pot, I want to have time to share the gospel with Jesus Christ. I don't know what it is that you need to say. Is this the most important thing or maybe the most important thing is to go share. And do you understand that in this kind of relationship with Christ nobody can put a guilt trip on you, nobody can come to you an say, you know you ought to do this. In fact, the kind of relationship this woman had with Christ was she couldn't help but do it. And the kind of relationship you have with Christ, you ought to be in a position where you can't help but at least say a word about Christ.

Now let me tell you there is a difference. There is a difference in the word *witness* and the word *testimony*. The word witness is what

somebody like me whose been in it a long time and been trained. I can sit down with the Bible and I can walk through the Bible with you, that's a witness. A testimony is personal, it's what God has done for me. And let me tell you most people don't respond well to a witness unless they're really hurting and really come to somebody like me, but when somebody hears a testimony, this is what God has done in my life, then people say I want to listen to you and the strongest thing you have is how God has changed you and the joy, the bubbling experience of being able to share with others.

One of the things that I wrestled with for a long time last year was, what are you going to do after you stop being pastor of Bon Air church? I felt like that maybe the time had come to give up working sixty or seventy hours a week and the time has never come for me to stop sharing God's call upon my life and so, in the province of God, that's another story. In the province of God, I will be working with Virginia Baptists a couple of days a week, because I want to tell you an issue that we have recognized. It's not just in Virginia, but let me narrow it to Virginia. In Virginia there are fifteen hundred Baptist churches, we are predominantly white Baptist churches. Eighty percent of those churches have stopped growing for at least five years or are now declining eighty percent. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that what they are projecting is true, that in twenty five years there wont be fifteen hundred Baptist churches in Virginia, there will be less than a thousand. Do you know why churches start dying? It's not because in Virginia we don't have nice buildings, it's not in Virginia you don't have good preachers, it's not in Virginia you don't have wonderful music. What is dying is the sheer joy of people in churches sharing with people outside of churches that I have found Christ and I want you to know Him. Somebody said to me a couple of months ago, "With our new facility our church is going to keep growing, we are going to get a good

preacher, our church is going to keep growing." One of the things I wanted to say to you is, it doesn't make any difference how many buildings you build, and it doesn't make any difference how many good preachers you get, if you don't share the joy, the church will never reach this area for Christ. Eighty percent of all people who say they come to Christ, do not come to Christ because of the preacher, because of the buildings, or the programs, they come to Christ because a friend shares with them the story of Jesus. And my prayer for you is that you shall live in such contact with Him and in such overwhelming gratitude in joy for who He is and what He has done and what He can do in other peoples lives that you don't have to say I know I ought too, you say in your life I can't help but. I've got to share with what Christ has done.

I had not been a Christian but a couple of weeks when a friend of mine came and asked me if I would be a counselor in a youth camp. He came to me on Wednesday and he said, "Have you already shared with all your fellows in your camp about Jesus" and I said, "No, I hadn't shared with one." I went to him and asked him if I could share with him my testimony. We walked over to a little chapel and a storm had come through, the lights were out. I had taken a flashlight to help us get over there and I turned to the young boy and I said, "You know I really don't know what to tell you except I just want to tell you what's happened to me. I'm a sophomore in college and I had been looking for a meaning and a purpose in life and I found it not long ago in Jesus and I don't know a lot of scripture but I just want to tell you about Jesus. I probably violated every principle of trying to talk to somebody and finally I turned to him and asked him like the old salesman, "You don't want to buy

anything, do you? You don't want to become a Christian do you?" And I flashed the light and realized the young boy, the young teenager was crying and he turned to me and he said, "Yes sir, I do." I want to tell you we got down on our knees in a blackened out little chapel and I prayed and said, "God I don't know what all I'm doing, but I know that you found me and I want you to find him and he gave his heart and life to Christ and a joy came into my life, that forty years later hasn't left. And you are going to find that whenever you share just what God has done for you, you are going to find a joy as you share it with others in the life of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you, "What would happen to this congregation if there were five hundred members, that's just one out of five, five hundred members that could not help but share what Christ has done for them. What a difference it would make in your life and in this church and in this whole community and my prayer is that is what's going to happen in you. In a moment we are going to sing a hymn of invitation, that's our custom. We always invite people who want to profess their faith in Christ to come do that now, we invite people who want to be a part of this church to come do that then. But I wanted to ask you as you sit here today if you wouldn't say, "Dear God, be able just to share it with others what Christ has done. If God has been working in your life to help you to come to Christ, if Christ has been working in your life to help you to become a member of this church, as we stand together and sing, I hope you will come to do that right now. But the rest, will you just pray for a freshness and a vitality in your relationship that you will be able to have the joy of sharing with others. Let's stand together and let's sing, please.