

**Hungering for God**  
**Hungering for Religion**  
**John 4:1-26**  
**Sermon Outline**

**Introduction:** 100 years ago many scholars in the West predicted that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century religion would die out. But it is as strong as ever. People world-wide seem to be wired for religion. But this does not mean that our religious appetites are always properly ordered—whether on the right or the left. Jesus critiques both in John 4.

**I) Our hunger for liberal religion**

**A) Jesus and the Samaritan woman**

- 1) The woman: antagonistic to the religion coming out of Jerusalem  
*Are you greater than our father Jacob?!*
- 2) Jesus: Answering her challenge with some challenges of his own  
*You worship what you do not know...I who speak to you am he.*

**B) Jesus and us**

Religion to suit ourselves  
Ethics that work for us  
Comfortable agnosticism  
The ironic life-style

**II) Our hunger for conservative religion**

**A) The woman and Jesus**

- 1) The woman: feisty conservative running from the truth
- 2) Jesus: Full of welcome in word and deed

**B) Jesus and us**

Don't use religion to hide  
We won't get religion right until we get grace clear

### Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) How do you account for the fact that religion remains strong and growing in the modern world?
- 2) Christianity in its liberal form is not too demanding about either particular beliefs or particular behavior. In what ways does the woman at the well represent liberal religion? How does Jesus push back against her liberalism?
- 3) How do Jesus' statements in John 4:16, 22, 23, and 26 challenge the religious liberalism of our time? How might you present these statements of Jesus to a secular friend?
- 4) A symptom of religious liberalism's refusal to provide us with religious certainty is 'ironic living', which Princeton professor Christy Wampole describes as a way of getting through a life in which one is afraid to make commitments. She writes: "Irony is the most self-defensive mode (of living), as it allows a person to dodge responsibility for his or her choices aesthetic and otherwise. To live ironically is to hide in public. It is flagrantly indirect, a form of subterfuge...Somehow, directness has become unbearable to us....How did this happen? It stems in part from the belief that this generation has little to offer in terms of culture, that everything has already been done, or that serious commitment to any belief will eventually be subsumed by an opposing belief, rendering the first laughable at best and contemptible at worst. This kind of defensive living works as a pre-emptive surrender and takes the form of reaction rather than action" (New York Times, Sunday Review, 11/18/12). How ironic is your style of living? If it is, why is it? What would Jesus say to you about it—based upon what he says in John 4?
- 5) The woman at the well has a religiously conservative side which she uses to push Jesus away whenever he gets too close. How does she use her beliefs to keep Jesus away? Why does she do it? How might you use religion to keep God away from your real life?
- 6) In John 4 Jesus reveals himself to be both religiously conservative and religiously liberal. How does he evidence both? How does the 'liberal' Jesus push back against the abuses of conservatism? How does the 'conservative' Jesus push back against the abuses of liberalism?
- 7) How does the cross reveal God to be both liberal and conservative? How might knowing this God influence the way in which you speak of him to your friends?