

- I think that the story of the woman of Samaria is deeply moving because she is all of us. We all walk around carrying our sadness. I am not allowed to reveal it. I sit for coffee with my friends and I decide that they don't want to listen to my sorrows so I put on my happy face and tell my funny stories. People ask me how I am and I give them my generic answer, I'm fine. Truth is I am not fine. Truth is I won't share my burden with you. I tried before and you didn't want to know. Truth is I don't want you to know either.
- I remember meeting a woman who came to see me. So, we met at reception and we had our big smiles and warm handshakes. As soon as I closed my office door that woman burst into tears and she cried for an hour. Her public face was all smiles but her private face was Niagara Falls in tears. I remember when I trained in hospital ministry, we were given this advice. The patient is lying in his bed and he is terrified. He is surrounded by doctors and nurses who talk to each other in whispers. There are all kinds of machines and tests being done. The patient is waiting for the right person to come at the right time to ask the right question, so that they can open up and tell their story. That is the job of the chaplain.
- We won't tell just anyone. Jesus waited for the woman of Samaria but the woman of Samaria was waiting for Jesus as well. She yearned to meet somebody who would give her the time to tell her story. We live in a world where people don't want to listen and they don't want to give their time. Rule No. 1, "Be nice." Rule No. 2, "Go to counselling always." An amazing thing happened to me and Jeanette last week. We went to the coffee shop to have a bit of lunch. So, we sat there quite happy chatting away about everything. Then a woman approached us and she said that she was sitting over there watching us. She said that it was the most beautiful thing she ever saw, two people happily chatting to each other.
- What makes that remarkable is that, that ordinary thing is remarkable today. Our normal default position now is to visit the coffee shop armed with laptops and smartphones. You sit down put on your headphones and you shut everyone out. That happens in public and it happens at home as well. I don't want to talk to you. I don't want to listen to you either. So where do you go to find somebody who is willing to listen? I know you are all sitting there thinking, that is so true. People don't want to talk to each other anymore. I have news for you. You are those people. In ten minutes time you will put on your headphones and you will shut us all out. You will put your hand up to my face and you will say, "Whatever!"

- What powerful medicine it is to listen well, to give someone your time, to put aside everything that distracts and just pay attention. Tell me your story. In the time that Jesus spent with this woman, by his willingness to listen he opened her up completely. Together they broke all the rules of society. Women don't talk to stranger men. Samaritans don't talk to Jews. You keep to yourself. This woman spilled it all out and it was good for her. She wasn't asking for judgment and He wasn't giving it.
- Jesus brought her healing by just listening well. Maybe if we all made a bit of an effort to listen well we wouldn't all be going to the doctor, and the counsellor and the priest to find someone to pay attention. What a lovely feeling it is when someone says that you really helped. You didn't even have to give advice. When we give people a place where they can just tell their story, the healing happens before our eyes. Clarity comes. Energy flows. Wisdom and understanding comes. I start to work it out. I get to vent for a while and then I feel better. I get to cry my tears and then I feel even better. No judgment. All you did Jesus, was listen to me very well. You didn't interrupt me. You didn't give me advice. You just listened, and I appreciate that.