

March 19, 2017

The Samaritan Woman At the Well

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and always be acceptable unto Thee.
O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

The Gospel readings for last Sunday and this Sunday center around personal private conversations that Jesus had with an individual. And yet the two settings and the two individuals could not be more different. Last week Jesus is in Jerusalem near the temple. And a Pharisee, Nicodemus, one of the leaders of the Jews comes to Jesus by night. He is one who exemplifies what it is to be Jewish. He follows the law, he is a leader of the Jews. He is in the holy city and he comes and they have a conversation that Nicodemus has difficulty completely understanding. Because it calls him to become someone else. To change. To become one dependent upon God rather than the law. To become one who is born not simply of flesh but born of the Spirit. It was difficult for him to understand. And that conversation ends without us having a real clear idea and understanding of what Nicodemus took away from that conversation.

Now in the Gospel reading for today Jesus has left Jerusalem. He's heading back up North to his home town of Nazareth. He's traveling through Samaria. Samaritans and Jews don't like each other. Usually when you had to make that trip as a Jew you went through as quickly as you could to get back to the land of your fellows. Jesus makes it as far as Sitar, he's tired, it's noon. They've been traveling probably since morning. He's ready for a rest and he's ready for some food.

And so, he stops at Jacob's well. Normally at noon that would be a place that was very quiet. Most people most of the women of the city would have come to the well early in the morning. So, that they would have their water for the rest of the day. It was also the gathering place for the women of the city. They would come together all to get their water and they would talk about the news of the city. They would talk about what was going on in their lives. There might be just a bit of gossip. Maybe. But that was always early in the morning before the heat of the day so that they would have their water.

Jesus sits here and it's about noon and a woman shows up. Now there are many things going on here as she comes. Jesus is thirsty, he asks her for a drink of water. Now normally, a man would not talk to a woman in such a way. In that kind of a place. It simply wasn't done. And for a Jew, I don't know exactly how she understood he was a Jew but picked up on that right away. A Jew probably wouldn't talk to any Samaritan let alone a man speaking to a woman Samaritan.

And yet he has the audacity, to ask her for a drink of water. And she comes back to him with attitude. How is that you, a Jew, ask me a woman of Samaria for a drink? At the 8:00 service I said you know if that was done today I could see the woman going (snaps fingers in zigzag motion) (laughter). It just wasn't done. And his response and again just like Nicodemus. Nicodemus comes to Jesus you know you are Rabbi you come from God because nobody can do what you're doing without God's presence. And Jesus immediately takes it to a deeper level, starts talking about being born again, about the kingdom of God being near and entering the kingdom of God. And again, he does the same thing with this Samaritan woman. You know if you knew who was asking you for water, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

Well this really throws off the Samaritan woman, oh now who are you. I mean the well is deep, you don't have a bucket. You know, Jacob gave us this well. His son Joseph this was his land, they came, they drank from this well. Are you trying to tell me that you're greater than Jacob? You almost, I almost see Jesus saying well yeah. If you had only asked, if you only knew who you were talking to then I would have given you water that brings a spring of water welling up into you. So, that you would never be thirsty again.

Now this intrigues the woman because she is an outcast. We find out why later. But we know she's an outcast because normally she would have come with the other women to share the news. But she waits until noon, she comes alone. She doesn't want to be with others so she comes alone. So, this intrigues her. Well sir yes, I would like that. Give me that water so I'll never be thirsty again. And I never have to come to this well anymore. And he wants to give her, go and get your husband and bring him back and we'll do this. Oh well but I have no husband. And this is where Jesus really gets her. You're right, you don't have a husband, you've had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. She was a woman of ill repute, it seems.

Now this gets her even more involved. How can he know? How can this person, this stranger who's a Jew traveling through Samaria? How can he possibly know this? And so, she takes it to the next step. Well you know, you know we know that a Messiah is coming. The Christ, when he comes then everything will be made clear. And Jesus to a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day. Well I'm the one you're looking for. That's me. I have come and now is the time.

It's all about what he's bringing. What he's giving and bringing her in step by step. And he gets to that point where she finally asks well you know this Messiah will tell us all things and you know you Jews think that the only place to worship is Jerusalem and we Samaritans worship here on this holy mountain and the Messiah will clear all this up. And then Jesus takes her to the same place that he took Nicodemus. He said it's not going to matter where, that's never going to be the point. Nor how except that you worship in spirit and truth. Spirit and truth. What does he tell Nicodemus? You must be born of water and the Spirit.

Spirit to Spirit. It's all about what God is giving and what God has given. And the spirit will become a part of those who believe and who come to God in honesty. Honest to themselves in who they are, how they bring themselves to God. How they offer themselves to God in honesty and truth. And the spirit of God being a part of God's offering to us. The woman is amazed.

This she likes. It takes away all these things about not being the same and who's right and who's wrong. It's about now coming to God in truth and Spirit because that's what God is looking for now. For those to come and be honest with themselves and be honest with God and offer themselves in the Spirit of God. Become connected in relationship without a Spirit. And now she's excited. So, excited that she gets over her anxiety about not being with the others. Being the outcast.

Now she can go back to the city and say there's this guy who's out at the well. Who has told me everything that I've ever done. Could he be the Messiah? Could he be the Christ? And that gets the other people in the city excited and they start coming out and they want to hear. And Jesus wants to tell. He has come to share with all the people. Another step of showing that this is not just for some and not others. This is an invitation to all the people. To come because God cares for you. Come because God is doing a thing for all people.

Come and share in this. Open your hearts. Open your spirits. So, that God can come in. So, that all these things that separate us. So, that all these things that divide us can be swept away. And we can be united by the Spirit of God. So, that we can be united to God. And united to one another. In spite of all the diversity. In spite of all the things that we might still disagree on. We will be held together by being born of the spirit. By having that living water. That spring of living water welling up in us. And allowing us to see life not as people would normally see it but as God would show it to us.

So, that we can see God as Father and Mother. So, that we can see God as the one who loves us even while we are sinners. Who cares for us even when we travel far away. Who watches for us to return. And this is based on the Spirit and is based on Jesus will continue to teach his disciples who then share it with the world. Love one another as I have loved you. That is my commandment to you. The closest, the witnesses, the ones who have seen, the one who have heard. Love one another as I have loved you. Let that be the Spirit of living in the world together.

Feed those who are hungry. Clothe those who are naked. Visit those who are sick and who are in prison. All the things that Jesus said to not only to his disciples but who gathered. Who came to hear about the kingdom of God? Let that be the focus and it moves all the things that we might disagree on. Might be a preference of how we will worship or where we will worship. That will be pushed to the side. Overwhelmed by what Jesus taught us to live for. To be born in the Spirit. To be refreshed in the Spirit. To be free to look beyond ourselves.

To love, to feed, to visit, to be with one another as brothers and sisters. The differences will always be there. There will always be different ways of looking about how we will worship, where we will worship, the configuration of the worship space. What should be the center, the altar for the sacrament, or the pulpit for the word? I can hear Jesus saying you know as long as you come to me in Spirit and truth you can do any of those things. They'll all work. They'll all have me at the center. So, leave each other alone. Stop trying to say ours is better than yours or this is better than that. Just be together. Come together and believe. Worship in Spirit and truth and you are united. Because it is one Spirit, one Lord, one God, and Father of all. That is who we worship. And that is so much more important than where or how we worship.