

March 15, 2020

Sharing the Story...Lent 4

Shepherd's Grace Church

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'—² although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'.⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' ²⁸Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' ³²But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' ³³So the disciples said to one

another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' ³⁴Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world. (John 4: 5-42)

Welcome to Lent. How are you doing in this season of sacrifice and service? Are you able to stay faithful to the promises you made on that Ash Wednesday that now seems like an eternity ago? Are you able to continue to press on in the midst of the distractions of the world around you?

You know, several weeks ago, I planned to ask these questions as a way of framing the story which we read this morning. In my mind I anticipated the Big 12 tournament or announcement of those college basketball teams that were embarking on the Road to the Final 4. I expected to be looking forward this afternoon to the conclusion of the Players Championship, one of my favorite golf tournaments of the year. I expected to be sharing stories of spring break and speaking of the struggles of going back to reality tomorrow morning as kids drag themselves out of bed and back to routine.

Lent is intended to be a season of struggle, a season of sacrifice...but I do not believe that anyone could have anticipated the struggles with which we would be dealing as we come together to worship this morning. Maybe though, just maybe though the struggle we face today can and will help us embrace the reality of Jesus Lenten Journey.

Maybe, just maybe the struggle we face today will help us draw into reality the journey of Lent. What Jesus experienced on the road to Jerusalem and the Cross were not mere words on a page. What Jesus experienced was real. It was 5 O'clock news type stuff! It was headline and front page! It made the top of the news feed for those who were paying attention. This morning...this morning is our opportunity to prove that we are paying attention.

I am quite confident as we gather this morning that there are certain preachers and certain worshipping communities who are pointing fingers at the morally decadent society we live in and placing blame on our lack of faith and discipleship as reasons for the introduction of COVID 19 in the first place. Perhaps you have come this morning, having read the passage from John 4 and wanting to assign blame to a particular person because of her immoral lifestyle. Some will. Some have.

If you will, or if you have, I invite you to consider another alternative. That alternative is to believe, to trust, to have faith. The Lenten season is a season of sacrifice, it is a

season of service...but it is also a season of increasing faith. The Lenten season is not a season of assigning blame. If it were, all of us would be guilty and the penalty for the sin which we have committed is death. The season of Lent is not a season of establishing some kind of moral superiority...if it were, we would all find ourselves at the bottom of the moral ladder looking up at some people we had once considered unsavory at best!

Lent is a time of journey together and the situation we find ourselves in in this world invites us to participate more completely in that journey than perhaps any Lenten season ever!

Today, as we live our lives absent the winner of the Big 12 basketball tournament, as we live our lives absent the "Road to the Final 4" as we live our lives with no drama this afternoon as players march down the 18th hole to victory or whatever else might have created drama in your life today, instead we find ourselves confronted with the reality of our own faith and with the question of how we are going to live into it.

I invite you to enter into the story of the woman at the well from this perspective this morning. From this perspective as well as from many others, for I believe that in this Lenten season, we have the opportunity to witness to our faith more than we ever have. We no longer need to think of the chocolate we sacrificed for the season. We no longer need to think of the extra reading we are going to do. Instead, we have the reality of sacrifice before us and we have the opportunity to learn first hand how to come together in that sacrifice...how to help one another...how to love one another!

God did not create a virus to punish. God does not do that. God did not create a virus to taunt us. God does not do that. Instead, God invites us into the place where we are this morning and says to us, "I have a plan for you, a plan for a future with hope!" (Jer. 29: 11)

Where will you choose to "Share the Story?" Where will you choose to face our current struggle from? Where will you embrace Jesus and the Journey he is on...the journey he invites us all to join?

Just before the point where our passage picks up this morning, the evangelist says Jesus had to pass through Samaria. I found this turn of phrase curious so I entered the story from this curiosity. Why did Jesus have to pass through Samaria? There are roads around this country...roads in fact which many Jews of Jesus day chose to take. Samaria was somewhat of an abomination to the Jewish people.

Samaria was a place where the left-behinds, the forgotten, the less-thans made their home. When the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon, all were taken except for those at the very bottom of Jewish society. The Babylonians did not want these dregs. They did not want the elderly, the poor, the worthless members of Hebrew society who could contribute nothing to the building of the Babylonian empire.

These left-behinds were driven to this place they came to call Samaria...a place of some historical significance to the Jewish people but more recently a place of exile, a place where a bastardized people were left largely to their own devices.

This was a place where Jesus had to go? Why?

To understand the question we have to know a little more about the Samaritans. These people of little worth, of little faith, of little moral character were left behind and eventually married into other peoples who migrated into the abandoned lands resulting from the exile of the more affluent members of the Jewish population. These people remembered their Jewish teaching but with no one to guide them, to help them in their worship, they began to practice worship in ways that were morphed...ways that were only in part of the faith tradition they had been given. The Apostle Paul would say, "Now they see only in part, but then, they will see fully, even as they have been fully seen." (1Cor. 13)

These Samaritans accepted the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, but they rejected the rest...the Psalms, the Prophets. As a result, they only got part of the story. They missed the fullness of the message. They missed at least part of the promise. They missed the message the people in exile received, the part about God's plans for us and those plans being carried out right where we are.

Those of us this week who are focused on all that has been taken from us, our games and our routines, our very lives as we know them might have missed this part also.

Jesus had to go through Samaria...because he was the part they missed. He was the answer, the reminder of God's incredible plan for grace and love that was to be extended to all people...right where they are.

If you also choose to enter the story from this point, remember as I had to learn that God extends God's love and God's plan for us to right where we are. This morning, we find God extending it to the well and to this woman who has no idea what is about to happen.

The woman comes about noon, an unusual time for the women to come and draw water from the well. Most preferred to come at an earlier hour when it would be cooler as they journeyed back to their homes with the heavy jar of water in tow.

This late hour has caused many to speculate that the reason the woman shows up at this time is because she is being shunned as a person of poor moral character by her peers. Think about the scripture as you read it in total. There is nothing in this passage to indicate that the woman is thought of as less than, and there is nothing to indicate that she is other than a citizen of the city.

So frequently, we impose our own judgments on what we read, not only in scripture, but in the news of other daily events as well. Before we rush to judgment, we should carefully examine the issue at hand and determine if even a judgment is due. Remember that God's admonishment to us is that we judge not, lest we also be judged! (Rom. 2)

Jesus is sitting at the well, and he seems to make no judgment of the woman. Instead, he gives the woman a chance to fulfill her responsibility as a human being. He is tired and thirsty and asks of the woman a drink. The woman is surprised. Jesus is obviously

a Jew, and the woman is a Samaritan. Jews share nothing in common with Samaritans as John tells us.

This human tradition is trumped by a higher set of circumstances. Today we read in Psalm 23 that the Lord prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies, anoints our heads with oil and invites us to eat and remain there. This edict invites us to recognize the absolute commitment to hospitality that the Jewish people are committed to...in fact, the radical hospitality to which all people are committed to. We are to love one another and care for one another.

When Jesus asks the woman for a drink, he is inviting her and all of us to transcend our sense of nationality, race, creed or economic circumstance. He is inviting us to remember that at the heart of our existence is the inescapable fact that we are all children of God, sheep of His flock, invited into His presence to enjoy the abundance which He has provided.

Remember how God prepares the table for the sheep of His flock? He prepares the table in the presence of our enemies; anoints our head with oil; our cup overflows and we dwell in the house of the Lord forever. There is no more hunger, no more thirst, no more suffering, no more pain. God's answer of radical hospitality is to be our answer and it is that answer, that response that Jesus seeks from the woman at the well.

The woman, however is unaware of the rules of radical hospitality. She has only been taught that Jews and Samaritans are to share nothing in common. The woman is taught even as we are taught today. Blacks are different from whites, Muslims are different from Christians, men are different from women. Because we are different, we are to share nothing in common with one another.

As we deal with the changes in our world as a result of this global pandemic, we find ourselves in a unique situation. Suddenly we realize that we are all connected. The virus we are trying to eradicate from our world has no respect for gentile or Jew, slave or free, woman or man. All are the same in the sight of this germ which is declaring war on us all.

What a wonderful opportunity to understand that in order to eliminate this virus, we must overcome our prejudice and share with one another, pooling our resources and standing in solidarity in order to re-claim the abundance which God intends us to live in.

The moment we come to at the well this morning points to a perfect teaching moment for Jesus, not only to the woman at the well, but to each one of us. "Woman give me a drink," He says. In that moment, he affords the woman an opportunity to practice radical hospitality in the very ways of God.

Because the woman does not know the ways of God, Jesus teaches. If you understood Psalm 23, or any of the other Psalms that invite hospitality as a characteristic of God, you would have understood who was asking and you would have asked him and He would have given you "Living Water."

Because the Samaritan woman was not a student of the Psalms, she could have not known God's ways. She could not have known God's promise to provide in the presence of whatever evil existed, a place of safety and sanctuary forever. Instead, the woman only knew of the hatred with which she had been brought up.

Jesus' promise mystified her. "Where is your bucket? Are you greater than..." These are the questions that came to mind. In today's world, we might say, "Will your vaccine be better...will your medical opinion be superior...will your method of eradication be more effective than the methods offered by others who also claim to be experts?"

Jesus did not respond with judgment of the expert testimony the woman brought. He does not respond with judgment to our testimony in light of the events of today. Instead, Jesus reminds us that it is by God's grace that we live and move and have our being in this world. It is by God's grace that we are fed. Man does not live by bread or even by water alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matt. 4)

These words quench the thirst of the heart and well up to wisdom that flows even to overflowing as a spring of eternal life. God's promise in Psalm 23 of a cup overflowing is the promise of living water that Jesus gives in this moment and the woman wants to drink! Who wouldn't!

Jesus, however is not finished with his teaching lesson. "Bring your husband," he says. The woman speaks truthfully. "I have no husband." The lesson is not for the woman at the well in this statement, but for us, for the generations who will follow! The answer is the truth. Jesus response is not to the woman's factual statement but rather to the fact that it is true.

Later, during his journey to the cross, he will re-emphasize this message to Pontus Pilate. "Jesus came for the truth." (John 18) When he finds it, he recognizes it and praises the woman for sharing it. The truth she shares is painful, perhaps embarrassing and certainly inciteful as to some of the challenges with which she has had to live. When Jesus recognizes it, he brings it to our attention. In this spirit of truth, the rest of the passage begins to become clear.

The only ways we are able to worship the Lord is in Spirit and truth. This morning, as many of our brothers and sisters around the globe are worshiping in their homes or in small groups via internet or recording they are distraught because they are not able to worship in their own places of worship. The point Jesus makes is that it is not about the place you worship. "The day is coming when people will not worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem." Places are not important. Attitudes are important.

We are reminded along with the woman at the well that our willingness to come before the Lord with all our stain and imperfection and lay our whole heart open to Him is the kind of worship God desires. Right not, in this moment many of us are terrified. We do not know how this situation that is gripping all of humanity will turn out. Jesus invites us to speak even to our fears and to our own failings. He invites us to recognize that we cannot overcome this virus. He invite sus to remember that creation is not ours to control. He invites us to the truth and He reminds us to set that truth at the altar of the Lord!

God invites us to look past the fear and face the truth. God is in control! God is whom we worship! God is with us wherever we go and it is in Him that we shall overcome all the struggles of this world and bring about His Kingdom which is and was and is to come!

Jesus sees this in the woman and her willingness to speak the truth. Unfortunately, others are not able to see it in her or even in Him. When his disciples return, they do not see the woman. She is after all, only a Samaritan. She is a nothing. She is a less-than! Their comments reflect their lack of recognition. They do not speak to her. They look right past her and look only to Jesus. They do not recognize the truth because they are afraid to confront it.

The truth leaves them and goes out into the world, speaking to all who hear. Come out and see the one who has told me everything I have ever done. Those who heard her were on their way out while Jesus went through the teaching exercise with His disciples.

They wanted him to eat but he would have none of it. They wanted him to drink but he would have none of it. In much the same way, the devil tempted Him in the wilderness and he would have none of it. Instead, he was fed from the adrenaline that came from knowing there is truth in the world and the God seeks worshipers such as this!

He had found one! He had connected with her and sent her out to begin the harvest. He knew he had others as well. He knew they were standing right in front of him. He knew they were us, the disciples. He reminded them that some reap, others sow and that He has sent them to reap where they did not sow.

The lesson to them is to us as well. Sometimes we connect with a person or group of persons who are ready to hear, not because of anything we have said but because they were prepared by someone else. In the moment when we invite them, their heart is open to the possibility of life in Christ and they receive the "Living Water" that comes into their lives in "Spirit and Truth!"

Such was the case for those who came out to Jesus as a result of the "Woman at the well." They came because she asked them, because she invited them...all of them...everyone she met! At first, they came because of her but then they heard Him! They knew from his words...from the Word which brought all things into being (John 1) that he was the Savior of the world!

There are so many places from which we can "Share the Story" today. We can enter from the perspective of the woman who told the truth or we can enter from authentic worship or we can enter from the opportunity we have to share the gospel with others.

One place I invite you to enter from is a place of courage.

Christ

Over

Virus

Infectious

Disease

1

9

Joshua 1: 9 Be strong and courageous knowing that I, the Lord Your God will be with you wherever you go!

In the days and weeks ahead, there will be many struggles. Let us speak truth to one another and worship God in Spirit and in Truth as we "Share this unique Story" that we are living. May God bless you all! Amen!