

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) Jesus 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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." The 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."

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

said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They 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 Savior of the world." ---- JOHN 4

I recently read a book about what the younger generation, those ages 18-29 or so, think about Christians and Christianity. Many of these young people reject Jesus because they feel they have been rejected by Christians. Most of these young adults have attended church at some point in their lives, but what they have observed in Christians is not very flattering. Many in the generation feel as if they have been marginalized or demonized by those who love Jesus. If this is true then we have a serious problem.

In a recent study, the younger generation had these perceptions of Christians; Christians are anti-gay, judgmental, hypocritical, old-fashioned, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, boring, and too involved in politics. To these young people, modern day Christianity no longer seems Christian.

You may think this is odd, but I tend to agree with their assessment. I saw it for the first time when I was about 12 years old. My sister Linda married a man who was divorced. The church told my parents and my sister that she was no longer welcome in the church, even on nights when the church met in our home. My mother refused to speak with her, and my sister was banned from calling or visiting our home. Months later my father and I would make clandestine visits to go see her, and my father would tell me not to tell my mom.

Why do we Christians come off as morally superior, judgmental, and hypocritical in the eyes of the world? Are we judgmental? Sometimes we are, and because of it we have erected barriers between ourselves and the world, and we have closed the doors of the church to those who are most in need of hearing the good news of the gospel.

In this morning's text, we hear the story of the Samaritan woman, a story we have heard before. We have studied it in Sunday School and heard sermons about this woman. Somehow we have come to the conclusion that this she was of ill repute, a woman with a low cut blouse, heavy mascara, long and colorful finger nails, wearing high heels and dressed in a short skirt. She's the kind of girl our mother and preacher warned us about. Don't even make eye contact with the seductive woman or you will be caught up in her web.

But the text does not say any of these unflattering things about the woman. In fact there is nothing unflattering about her in the reading. All the text says is that she was a Samaritan woman who had been married five times

and that the man she was currently with was not her husband. We falsely assume that the woman was promiscuous and that she had been divorced 5 times. Jesus, however, passes no moral judgment on the woman, but instead he treats her like a human being of equal worth.

If anyone should be judged in this text it is Jesus. Jewish men were to have nothing to do with a Samaritan. Samaritans were an off-shoot of Judaism, and according to Jew law they were unclean. A rabbi like Jesus would be forbidden to speak to a woman alone, so it is Jesus who creates the scandal, not the woman. Jesus, rather than erecting walls of hostility, breaks down the walls and has the longest conversation recorded in the gospels.

Jesus goes out of his way to visit Samaria, and Jesus reveals himself to the woman at the well. Three times in the book of Genesis men encounter a woman at a well and they become engaged to marry. This is not a traditional story of “man meets woman and they live happily ever after”. This is an encounter that changes a woman, who then becomes an evangelist in her community, and a community is saved by Jesus.

The church is not a club for the saved and self righteous, even if that is the world’s perception of us. The church is a hospital for the spiritually broken, and our doors must remain open for all. The church is like a well where we come to drink from the living water, the Spirit of God, and then we are to go into the world like the Samaritan woman and invite others to come and see.

There is no room in the church for moral superiority. The Apostle Paul said it best when he wrote “We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Paul should know: He once participated in murdering Christians.

The message that we have is not just for us. The message is inclusive, it is for the world. The message of God’s love is for all sinners, sinners like us, and it is for sinners outside of these doors. If you have encountered Jesus, then it is your responsibility to tell others about him. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Tell them your story of how you met him and how he has changed your life. Tell them that he has overcome your despair and given you hope, and that he has healed your wounds and made you whole. Tell them that Christ has given direction to your life and given you meaning.

Then invite them to come and see for themselves.