

Session 4 - Woman at the well John/Jesus returns to Galilee/Jesus heals an official's Son – John 4:1-54

The woman at the well is in direct contrast to Nicodemus the chapter before.

- Nic comes at night/Woman during the day
- Nic is establishment religious insider/Woman has a chance encounter
- Nic leaves still in the dark in more ways than one/Woman leaves eager to invite everyone (Come and see) (Many believed because of her testimony)
- Named Male/Un-Named woman of an enemy people

Thus, a questionable Samaritan woman becomes the first evangelist in the Gospel and Jesus' own disciples were astonished (v.27) that Jesus was even speaking with her!! Her questionableness is only in her being a Samaritan woman and not that she is a sinner who has been with all these different men – The text never indicates that – but interpreters have put that on her over the years – Really all that I in the text is that she is the model of growing faith!

Jesus had to go through Samaria in order to get to Galilee – Scholars are evenly divided on whether this is theological or geographical or both.

Jesus crosses established religious and cultural boundaries in order to bring living water to that which was despised – The Samaritans!! 2Kings 17 and then in the intertestamental period the Samaritans claimed that Mt Gerizim was the proper place of worship and not Jerusalem – Jewish troops destroyed the shrine at Mt Gerizim in 128 BCE and the rift was on completely, so to speak!

Jesus breaks two huge boundaries which would have been scandalous to first century hearers of this tale – Chosen vs. Rejected and Male vs. Female.

This is an encounter while doing the most basic and mundane tasks – going to a well in search of water in the desert in ancient times – The Greek has a double meaning here and we do not know which is meant – even though they are similar – living water or Running spring water – Either translation works in the text.

This should help us be more attentive to the Divine in the ordinary and look for it more often (For those of you who listened to my sermon on Sunday 😊) We tend to look for the big, the wow, the extraordinary etc. etc. etc.

Although this was extraordinary since a Jewish man would not initiate a conversation with an unknown woman – let alone a public conversation at that – And secondarily Jews did not invite contact with Samaritans!!

This story should bring to mind the betrothal at the well stories in Genesis (Isaac 24:10ff & Jacob 29:1ff) and Moses in Exodus 2:15ff.

Throughout history people have defined themselves over and against other groups – This text could be a corrective to this thinking when we fall into it and help us see the other’s humanity as well as our own.

BREAK TO SECOND STORY

In the second story of this chapter Jesus encounters a “Gentile” a “Royal Official” a “ROMAN.” As a royal official he is most likely used to being, as Gregg Knepp puts it, “Large and in Charge.”

But now he is reduced to experiencing “powerlessness” i.e. “The Desert” of loss.”

Loss is often the great equalizer in life whether it be physical, emotional (broken relationship for example), financial, or something else – Loss exposes our vulnerabilities, re-orders our priorities and reminds us of our existential finite humanity.

Jesus seems to assume that the official will not believe without seeing a sign (remember there are no miracles in the gospel of John only signs) but all the official does is ask Jesus to, “Come before my little boy dies!”

And Jesus without any fanfare at all simply says, “Go, your son will live.”

We are told that the whole household came to faith and...

That this is the second sign that Jesus performed!!

If we are keeping track then we have a turning the water into wine (revealing Jesus’ Glory) and now healing without condition (Revealing Jesus’ gift of LIFE!)

Reflection for Personal Spiritual Growth

To truly experience God’s love, mercy, and grace-both towards ourselves and others – requires a process of personal and spiritual transformation which allows us to let go of the ego of our false self and to see the image of God that is within all people. What Carl Rogers in the psychology field would say is the Unconditional positive regard towards your clients no matter what you may think of them and what they may have done!

Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it! (Mark 8:35)

In other words, shedding one’s EGO to understand that all of us including us are beloved children of God!

This is hard because it is a constant process of overcoming and intentionally seeking to overcome the barriers that define and divide people as **US** and **THEM!!**

We do not pretend that differences do not exist – but we tend to look at them differently when we can shed our own egos and arrogance.

-Who are those that we categorize as the “THEM” today in our neck of the woods?

List them out and then we will have an answer to the next question –

-Is there any one we could speak to and learn from this week, especially someone from a different religion, race, cultural, or economic background – or maybe a teenager – someone who is not a churchgoer – a homeless person – a LGBTQI person or community?

-What are some characteristics of your own ego or false self? Race, class, social affiliations, sexual orientation, cultural heritage, occupation, family status, education, religious tradition etc.?

What do you consider to be good qualities of your personal identity?

What qualities of your identity/ego/false self can get in the way of your understanding and/or compassion for others?

-Can you think of a time when you had to let go of your false self in order to become more fully connected to God or others? Write it down and think it about so you can share with another person when the time is right!

*Gregg Knepp suggests an interesting practice to try sometime. Go to a public space where all sorts of people come and go and just sit and watch them and notice things about them such as colors and shapes etc. and then spend some time using the mantra – **You all are beloved of God!***

From Gregg Knepp’s book – Some Questions for congregational leaders (These are hard and maybe even irritating to reflect upon)

-How often does fear and the fear of the other get in the way of congregational mission and ministry?

-If the church exists not for its members but for those who are not its members yet – how does our context reflect this reality?

Who are the others in your community?

-What are this congregation’s voiced and unvoiced fears that will need to be faced in a first step process?

-In what ways is our church a hospital for sinners and not a museum for saints?

-Does chapter 4 of John’s gospel relate to you in any way?

Walk around our church and sanctuary and identify those things that might be perceived as barriers to outsiders? – Make a list if you notice several things – who knows maybe some ministry might come out of this list!

What biases or prejudices have you heard expressed in your congregation even by you us and everyone?

Would the “Samaritan” woman be welcomed in your congregation – The “Royal Official” – Jesus? Why or Why not?

-What small steps can your congregation take or may be taking to model a spirit of welcome, hospitality and inclusiveness?