

“The Bad Samaritan”
John 4: 5 – 26
Makemie Presbyterian Church
October 11, 2009

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, & Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone into 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, & 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."

The woman said to him, "I know that the 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."

This ends the reading.

This summer, after my training at Lake Tahoe was completed, John & Jaxon flew out west & we went to the Grand Canyon. The first morning we sat in the cafeteria & wrote down all the things we wanted to do & see while we were there. It was a long list. There was a woman who helped arrange in park tours & I thought she might offer some help as to what was possible or impossible to achieve. Number 20 on the list was to try Navajo fry bread.

She said, "Go to the Navajo trading post in Cameron. In the back of the trading post is a little restaurant. They have fry bread."

The third day of our trip as we drove through the Painted Desert, to the Cameron trading post, John said, "I hope they have sopaipillas."

Now for you Easterners, sopaipillas are a kind of fried pastry and the frying causes the dough to puff & crisp & creates a large air pocket in its center, which you fill with honey & butter. It's the state pastry of Texas. John said, "I hope they have sopaipillas." At the Cameron Trading Post, we wandered through the shelves of moccasins, display cases of silver & turquoise jewelry, arrowheads, & other trinkets.

In the restaurant our waitress was a Navajo woman, older woman. We placed our order, “stew meat, veggie tacos, fry bread and sop ... She goes to step away. Done with us & my ordering. “Wait,” I said. “We also want to order sopaipillas.”

“No” she said.

“But it’s right here on the menu,” I said pointing. And trotted out some of my best foolishness.

“No.”

“But we want Jaxon to try...”

“No.” And off she went.

When I went up to the register to pay, I said, “Do you still serve sopaipillas?”

And the teenager behind the register said, “Sure.”

So while the guys went off to look around the trading post, I went back into the restaurant section. An older man came up to me and said, “Can I help you.”

And I said, “I’d like to talk to the woman that waited on me.” I described her.

And he said, “I don’t know who you’re talking about, but anyway she’s not here.”

She didn't like me. I never saw her before in my life. I said nothing out of the way. She was not friendly to me. She was not hospitable to me. She did provide food. Why was she that way?

I think I know. I think she was of that attitude toward me for the same reason I would've been if I was in her place. The white woman comes through the reservation and it's another reminder of the white people coming through a hundred years before, a hundred thirty years before, the white man came through. He shot the buffalo, raped the land, cut the trees, soiled the creeks, set the Navajo's on the Long Walk, & shoveled her & her people up into one little place on the Pecos River & said, "This is your reservation."

I'm sure that when she looked at me, she could remember the time when I didn't exist. And all that land belonged to them. Her people. And the reason it was their land is because they understood, it was not their land. The only way you can say, "this is our land" is to know this is not our land. They could jump on a wiry Mustang and chase those buffalo. Buffalo in thundering herds that shook the earth. Look at the eagle fly out over the canyon, drink from the clear stream. Sleep in peace at night, all this land.

And now my ancestors shoveled them up in a little pile and said, “this is your reservation.” And it was the poorest piece of land in the area.

When you’re making your way from Jerusalem to Galilee, you’re going north. If you’re walking it’s about three days. Jesus did. When he got to the hills in Samaria, he was thirsty. It was about noon. And he sat on the curb of the well. His disciples went into town to buy food. And a woman came out to draw water. I don’t know her name. She’s a Samaritan woman. I don’t know if she has any children. I don’t know if she has any grandchildren. I would guess that she’s probably about 67 years old. Now I know you all grew up in Sunday School & you had a picture of Jesus & the woman at the well in which she was very attractive & she was 35 & wore a red dress.

I’m sorry about the way this woman’s been treated in the history of the church. Why? Because it says, “she had five husbands and is now with a man who is not her husband.” May I remind you that’s not her decision. That’s the man’s decision. According to the scripture, Deuteronomy 24, “If a man finds something in a woman, his

wife, that he doesn't like, displeasing, unseemly, says the old translation, he can give her a bill of divorce & send her out."

And if she has that some other man can marry her, find something wrong, send her out. She can't cook, she sleeps late, can't bear children which was always the woman's fault, & around she went & around she went at the pleasure of the men. She never said, "I want to marry this one, this one, this one, this one." She had no choice. Don't blame her. You want to have her mince & priss as she walked & wear a tight red dress & mascara eye, & tinklers on her ankles & try to ambush every man, you can do that at your own leisure but she was not that kind of woman.

I think she's kind of old really. She's been around the barn. Came out to draw water & Jesus asked her for a drink.

Why in the world did she talk to him? He's coming from Jerusalem. Why did she talk to him? He's a Jew for goodness sake. Why does she talk to him? They're the ones who put her on the reservation. Samaria is a reservation. Tap, tap, tap.

And for a 1,000 years they've lived on the reservation. Oh, it wasn't that way in the beginning. You know where she lived? She lived in the hill country in the middle part of that place.

You know where the first capital of all of Israel was? Where she lived.

You know where the first temple was? Where she lived.

You know where the first king came from? Where she lived.

You know where the first prophet came from? Where she lived.

You know where Jacob watered his cattle & raised his boys? Where she lived.

Oh it was rich. It was rich then. They had their own bibles, had their own priests. They had their own temple. They had everything. It was a wonderful place. And then came David.

King David said, "I want everybody to come to Jerusalem. I'm going to make that my capital." He was from down south in Judea and that's where Jerusalem was.

And he said, "I'm making Jerusalem the capital. I want to build the temple right next to my palace. And we'll have temple & politics joined together. And when you can get religion & patriotism together you've won the country."

And so he robbed from the mountain people, took away their temple, destroyed their things, killed some of the priests, & brought the ark of the covenant & the sacred candlestick to Jerusalem because David wanted that to be the capital.

“But can’t we...”

“No.”

“But can’t we still...”

“No.”

“Well what about can we...”

“No!”

It is Jerusalem.

And so she walks every day through the rubble that was once her temple, sees weeping the men who were once her priests..., and along comes a Jewish man.

Why didn’t she just say, “Take your water & I hope you make it back to civilization.”

I don’t know. She’s an unusual woman. She talks to him. She’s sort of smart aleky. Maybe it would have helped if that woman out in Cameron, Arizona was a smart alek at least we could have talked.

She said, “Well a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Now, miracles will never cease.”

He said, “Woman, you don’t know anything.”

She argued with him. She’s tough. She disagreed about everything. And she said, “Oh yeah. And you say Jerusalem is the

place to worship. You've got all that have you. Well we have the original temple, it's in ruins now thanks to you."

And they argued. She listened. She talked. She listened.

And he said something to her that was overwhelmingly radical. "Woman, the time has come when it doesn't matter whether you're on the reservation or off the reservation. Whether you are in this mountain or in Jerusalem that has absolutely nothing to do with it. Because God is a God of spirit. And we worship according to God's own nature which is spirit, so the place doesn't matter. You and I are alike under this God, we are brother and sister under this God."

She, she almost believes it. She runs into town, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did."

And then she says, "This, this can't be the Christ, can it? Can this, this can't be the Messiah?" Whew....

What's remarkable about that story? She talked to Jesus.

She was willing to communicate with him beyond 10 centuries of hatred and destruction and murder and oppression, confinement. She talked past it. Unlike the woman on the reservation who never said a word.

This woman talked. And the miracle of the story, the miracle of the story, is not that Jesus was of so large of heart that he would embrace a despised Samaritan woman. That's not the point. The point is she actually accepted it. She had faith that was stronger than 1,000 years of being stomped on & spat upon. Now that is something. I haven't met a person in the whole New Testament like this woman.

I know how we usually read it. The wonderful thing Jesus did reaching out to the despised, to the bad Samaritan woman. And all the lessons we draw from that of we ought to reach out to all people regardless of their circumstances. True enough. True enough.

But the point of the story is that she listened. And she accepted. Now we like to pride ourselves on being open to Samaritans of all kinds. We say it about every week; we say it about the Lord's Table, about everything about this church, that everybody is welcome. If you have money if you don't have money that's not the point. You're educated, not educated that's not the point. Have a rich family tradition you're a nobody, that's not the point. You've been in trouble you're not in trouble, that's not the point. You're a minority person, that's not the point; black, Hispanic, Asian, that's not the point. Everybody is welcome. We say that a lot. But let's not pop our

suspenders as though we were saying, “we’re going to include you.”
Let’s have a little prayer that the person to whom we speak will listen and accept what we say.

I said to the woman, “We like to order some sopiapillas.”

And she said, “No.”

“Well I wanted Jax...”

“No.” (tap)

And friends, I don’t blame her. I don’t blame her at all.

But what I’ve learned from is this. It’s more blessed to give than to receive. But it is also a whale of a lot easier. It is easier to witness for Christ than to listen to a witness for Christ.

Now I understand that strange thing Paul said to the Romans. “I’m going to Jerusalem with the offering for the poor saints that are in a famine in Jerusalem. I want you to pray for me that I’ll have a safe trip.”

But then he said, listen. “I want you to pray that they’ll accept the money.”

Why wouldn’t they? Why wouldn’t they?

When you speak of God, when you speak of Christ, when you welcome people to this church, would you take just a little moment &

realize how hard it is for anybody to listen to you if they have suffered. It is more blessed to give than to receive. But it's easier.

When you speak -- speak as the listener.

When you give – give as the receiver.

When you love – be as the one being loved.

In their place, in their lives, in their shoes. Please. Amen.