

Sermon 03-15-20 3 Lent

John 4 - The Samaritan woman at the well and the Living Water

Readings can be found here:

http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent3_RCL.html

Well, these are interesting times! I was speaking with 99-year old Mr. Floyd O'Connor the other day and he said, 'These are some strange times. I don't remember living through anything like this before!' Coming from him, that means a lot!

It's wise that we cancel church this week. We don't want to spread this virus. What's difficult about this COVID-19 virus is that people can have it for up to 2 weeks before showing any symptoms of being sick. So, people can walk around getting everybody sick while being totally unaware that they're spreading a disease. So, in the end, it's wise and for the good of the whole community that we cancel major community gatherings. At the same time, there's something missing when we don't gather. I miss seeing each of you in church, singing the gathering song, "We have come into this house, gathered in this place to worship..." We're missing out on the connections we make by being present together.

Also, we grow suspicious of people. If we hear someone cough, or even cough in a way that sounds like a sneeze or something, then our suspicion grows. We see that person as a pariah. They are an outcast. We think: Don't touch that person. Keep away. Run away! And they're left out.

I wonder if any of you can remember a time that you were left out. Perhaps a time when social customs kept you separate or apart from someone or some group?

The Samaritan woman is an outcast. In today's Gospel, Jesus is worn out and tired from his journey. He sits down by a well while his disciples leave him to go and find provisions. A Samaritan woman walks up to draw water and Jesus speaks with her and asks her for some water. The Gospel passage shows the woman's surprise. She doesn't instantly answer his request for water. Instead, she asks, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" She's aware of their differences. She's aware of social customs. She's aware that they are separated. In fact, the Gospel says parenthetically, "(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)" Social

customs say these two people shouldn't be talking to each other! Jesus is breaking the social rules. He's supposed to stay in his place and she's supposed to stay in hers! That's just the way things are done.

I'm sure some of you are familiar with this refrain: That's just the way things are done. Some of you have become doctors and lawyers and business leaders. I wonder if some of you along the way were told, "You can't do that!" Especially those of you who are black. I can imagine some of you hearing some voice along the way telling you what you can and can't do because of your race or gender. It might even be that the way society treats black people in general that the voice was in your own head? Perhaps the hardest part was seeing yourself overcome that voice telling you that you can't; this is just the way things are, or some other internalized inferiority? In today's reading, Jesus breaks through all of those social norms and reaches out to a Samaritan woman and asks for water.

The Samaritan woman (we never get her name) points out that Jesus is breaking social custom, Jesus points to his bigger mission. He points to himself as living water. "Whoever drinks 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." Jesus will give us living water and give it in abundance! (In our current period of isolation due to this virus, we are experiencing scarcity. We experience physical scarcity at the grocery store where many shelves are empty, lines are long and patience is thin. We also experience communal scarcity by missing out on our connections with other people. We miss joining hands and singing the Lord's Prayer. Yet, in the midst of our scarcity, Jesus brings abundance!)

The woman asks for the water Jesus is offering. Jesus turns and asks about her personal life, divining her current living situation. She confesses Jesus as a prophet and goes back to her village to preach Jesus. Now, remember that one of the key themes in the Gospel of John is this inversion of 'seeing'. Those who are well educated and 'smart' don't seem to have eyes to see Jesus. While those who are lowly and physically blind are the very ones who see Jesus as the Messiah. Last week, the educated religious leader Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night and doesn't understand when Jesus says he must be born again! He's blind. In today's reading, a woman with a precarious past sees Jesus as the Messiah **and** goes to preach Jesus to her village!

The best part of this story comes towards the end with the verse, “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony... we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” (Who says we can’t have women preachers?!?!)

So, how do we let social convention get in our way of seeing Jesus? How do we say something like, “How is it that you a Jewish man speak to me a Samaritan woman?” What ways do we put Jesus into a box and miss out on what Jesus is doing in our lives and the lives of the people around us? How many times do we limit ourselves by saying, “That’s just not done!” I’ve read about and heard the story of St. Augustine’s Church being the home of the Black Panther feeding program. In 1969 it started here at St. Augustine’s (well, in the old location on 27th & West). It’s a source of pride for our church! AND, I’ve heard that when it happened, some people in the church were vocal in their opposition. Some members of the church didn’t want to be associated with the Black Panther Party. Maybe they had a point. At the same time, low-income hungry children were being fed. I’m glad enough people at the church (and the minister) were able to see through all the social and political objections to the way things are done and the way things might look and said, “Let’s feed the children!”

Perhaps this Lenten season will give us eyes to see Jesus, even if it means going against the rules of society! As we live isolated lives for the next few weeks, let’s remember the woman at the well in all her imperfection, who preached Jesus to her village! And many came to believe...

Prayer: This is another day, O Lord. We know not what it will bring forth, but make us ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If we are to stand up, help us to stand bravely. If we are to sit still, help us to sit quietly. If we are to lie low, help us to do it patiently. And if we are to do nothing, let us do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give us the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Blessings,
Rev. Jim