

Sunday August 9, 2020
Lesson 10: Come and See
Scripture: John 4: 7-30, 39-42

Context:

We go to the Gospel of John to examine the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. This story is only found in the Gospel of John and is full of allusions and metaphors to the purpose of Jesus. We hear Jesus speak grace to those who are different, highlighting the inclusivity of his ministry.

The setting of this story is extremely important to understand the power of the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus finds himself in enemy territory as the Samaritans had been advocating for the rebuilding of Mount Gerizim while the Judean exiles focused solely on building the Temple in Jerusalem.¹ The situation had become an ancient Hatfield and McCoy affair as the people constantly bickered. There was an unspoken rule to not venture into the territory of one another.

And yet Jesus does veer through crossing through the land to get to his next destination. Jesus meets someone who is a minority: a woman, Samaritan, and polygamist.² They should not talk and yet they do. In the midst of their conversation the truth is revealed about the obvious differences between them.

However, Jesus is there to offer her something different. He talks of living water and how to receive it and he speaks of how the religious differences between groups are not permanent. Jesus tells the woman he knows about her including the fact that she is not married to one husband, but has had several. He tells her of the Messiah and reveals his identity to her. Their conversation transcends boundaries which had existed for years.

The exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is included in the book for several reasons. The first is to help the author explain the early spread of the gospel to the “non-Jews” of Samaria, rooted in Jesus’ life experiences.³ Jesus obviously meant to speak to this woman and his message was meant to be shared with her people.

This story also helped to remind the early Christian community of how old wounds should not lead to groups cutting off one another. There can be religious divisions even between close cousins such as the Samaritan-Jewish dynamic split, leading

¹ Sloyan, Gerard. “John,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for First and Second Kings*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 52-53.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 58.

to years of antipathy.⁴ The behavior of Jesus in this story shows he is against this prejudicial antagonism.⁵ Jesus is showing a new way of being to all parties.

Application

The word community is often thought to be a beautiful and powerful word to describe how people are connected to one another. We often imagine different people doing life together whether it is two neighbors throwing a ball to each other or someone volunteering to take care of someone in need. Community should indeed be these images.

Yet there is another part of community, which is hard. Community is also figuring out how to live with the fundamental differences shaping each one of us. Where we see community fail is when we begin to make people outsiders and deem they are unworthy to be considered a person. Sometimes it happens intentionally, yet most times people exclude others and they are not even aware they are doing so.

We do not know everything about the Samaritan woman or the ongoing conflict between the Samaritans and the Jews. We do gather from this story of how the wounds were so deep, neighbors were not talking to each other. Parties were hurt with one another and there seemed to be no chance of reconciliation as debates continued to escalate between the two parties.

Jesus made it pretty clear his ministry was not partial to one group. Both were part of one family and he intended to be the bridge. While the fundamental differences would continue to exist between them, they were meant to draw from the same wells and to see one another as neighbors. The gospel was for all of them.

How profound a message for today as we find ourselves in trying times. Over the past few months we have seen a ripple effect from the pandemic and the internal tensions within our country. No community has been protected from the chaos and confusion. I've heard more stories of strained family relations, friends who are not speaking to one another, and even churches bickering among themselves over whatever issue arises. It appears the symptoms of Covid-19 include more than a fever and a runny nose. They include distrust, unrest, and anxiety.

Jesus makes it pretty clear in his exchange with the Samaritan woman at the well of his calling on our lives to remember how the differences are not to separate us. In community with each other, we are to remember how all are important. There are boundaries to be observed certainly, and yet there is to be an optimistic spirit in which we work with others. Those who are different than us are not enemies to be conquered but are instead people who show us other perspectives of life. The power of community is when we come together and do not allow the differences to separate us from how we do life together.

Strong communities understand the importance of working together and seeing a

⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁵ Ibid., 58.

common goal. Communities flourish when they don't claim the well as their sole resource. Communities thrive when people see all those around them as neighbors and not just those who look and think like them. As Jesus demonstrates, community occurs when we drink from wells, which transcend this life and connect us to God and others.

What does the word community mean to you? What is an example of the present day Samaritans and Jews situation where groups spar with one another? Why do you think Jesus wants all people to be in community with one another? How does Jesus coming for all people change how you think about your neighbors, even those you don't like or those who are different than you?

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