

JESUS IN SAMARIA

A SERMON FOR LENT
SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2014
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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JOHN 4:5-42

There are some stories that you just can't cut short. There are some passages of scripture that have to be viewed as a whole. There are some times when you really do need to know what Paul Harvey used to refer to as the rest of the story.

The lectionary lessons for the next few Sundays are that way. So I'll be reading the stories in their entirety, and then preaching a one page sermon.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is one that only John recounts in his gospel, and it shows Jesus as one who is breaking down barriers, as one who is taking risks, as one who is bringing change into the world.

First of all, the Samaritans were hated and shunned by the Jews. They were considered a mongrel race for they had inter-married with Babylonians and Assyrians. They were also considered heretics; for they believed that they could worship God, the same God the Jews worshipped, on a mountain-top in Samaria, while all good Jews knew the only place that God could be worshipped was in the temple in Jerusalem.

Contact with a Samaritan rendered a Jew unclean. And that contact could be interpreted as simply having a conversation with a Samaritan. Devout and Orthodox Jews would travel a complicated route that involved crossing the Jordan twice in order to avoid going through Samaria. It is sort of like going from here to Chattanooga without going through Georgia. Or more like going from here to Monticello without going through Tallahassee.

But when Jesus wanted to return from Judea in the South to Galilee in the North, he plotted his course straight through Samaria, which meant that they would be "exposed" to Samaritans.

When the woman approached the well, for Jesus to speak to her was revolutionary. Men did not speak to women who were not members of their family, it just wasn't done. And for Jesus to take a drink of water drawn from the well by the hand of a Samaritan woman, well, no other Jew would have done that! And a woman who had been married five times, and was now living with a man who was not her husband and may indeed have been someone else's husband! Oh, my, the scribes and the Pharisees would have a field day with this one!

Maybe that is why John alone tells the tale: Matthew as the one trying to convert the Jews would never have told it, and Mark and Luke might have felt the same. But John has a point that he is making here: and the point is made when the woman goes into the city, and tells the people there about her conversation with Jesus, and the people come pouring out of the city to see this man, and indeed asked Him to stay two days. And He did. When Jesus left the city, many of the Samaritans believed in Him, not because of what the woman had said, but because of what they had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears, and they believed that this man Jesus, who broke down barriers between races and creeds and genders, was the savior of the world.

That is the point that John was making, when he alone told this story. It is what Jesus told Nicodemus in our story from John's gospel last week. John is proclaiming the heart of the Gospel, even when Jesus is in Samaria.

God so loved the world, that God gave the only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. And that good news belongs to the Samaritans, just as surely as to the Judeans and the Galileans. In going to Samaria, Jesus is hailed for the first time as the Savior of the World.

And to Him be the glory, the power, the dominion, and the praise, in the church and in the world, now and forever more, Amen.