

Sunday, February 24th, 2008
The 3rd Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-42
Missional Evangelism

This story is one of the bedrock stories of the Christian faith. The revelation of the Messiah, a Jewish man, who speaks to a Samaritan woman at a well to ask of her a drink of water. The simple existence of the conversation points to the fact that Jesus is different, that the Christian understanding of salvation is for the entire world, not bound by genetics or language or lines on a map. Of course, this conversation didn't and doesn't stop slavery, sexism, racism or other forms of oppression that continue today, including discussions about immigration, within the Christian community.

So, other than the fact that most Christians want to ignore how revolutionary this passage really is, it remains foundational to our faith. It may not grab our attention on all of the levels that it should, but it remains a very clear statement of God's intentions, particularly in the unique revelation that is Jesus Christ.

First, the base understanding that most of us have about this passage is that God cares about people God seemingly should not. Now, I think most of us get that at this point in time. However, the important underlying theological point is that God makes the first move (*Prevenient grace*). In this story, it is Jesus who initiates the conversation. Take in what that means for a moment. This conversation does not happen because the woman seeks Jesus out, like Nicodemus did in our passage last week, but because Christ speaks to this, a Samaritan woman, and indeed, Christ makes a request of her.

What does it mean that God asks her for something? It means that God wants something from her, or, perhaps more correctly, something for her. Do you honestly think that God is content to have this woman grinding out her daily life gathering water that does not satisfy when she could have living water?

But, the woman engages Jesus. She enters into the conversation, and by doing so, enter into his reality, even though she greets it with disbelief. She is curious, perturbed, who knows what about this man who speaks to her. But she engages, and in that engagement, other things become possible.

The disciples, when they return, are surprised that Jesus is talking to this woman. They shouldn't be, but they are. And while they are amazed with Jesus, the woman goes home. Eventually, we all go home. But something about this encounter, about this man who knows about her 5 husbands and everything else in her life, bothers her. It bothers her enough to make her tell her friends, and perhaps her family, or at least the people around her home. She speaks with questions, "He can't be the Messiah, can he?"

And the people hear what she has to say. Perhaps it is because they know her. Perhaps it is because of the enthusiasm, or the questioning or the passion in her voice. Perhaps it is because they see something different in her now. The passage doesn't really tell us anything like that. What it does tell us is that she

Sunday, February 24th, 2008

The 3rd Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-42

Missional Evangelism

spoke about her encounter, and some people listened. Some of them listened and believed that the man who greeted her at the well was the Messiah. And they invited Jesus to stay. They engaged Jesus in their place, and he stayed with them and they came to believe that he was, that he is, the Messiah. At first they believed because of her testimony, but now they believe because of what they have seen.

If this isn't a great description of the task of the church, I don't know what is. We are engaged by God. And somewhere in that engagement, in that encounter, in that discussion, whatever form it takes, we start wondering, "He can't be the Messiah, can he?"