



THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
MARCH 15, 2020
“OPEN OUR EYES”

JOHN 4: 5-42

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a])

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

“I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now



come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

SERMON

An extended family gathered in the hospital waiting room, where a family member lay gravely ill.



Finally, the doctor came in, looking exhausted.

“I’m afraid I’m the bearer of bad news. The only hope we have at this time is a brain transplant. It’s an experimental procedure, quite risky, and you’ll have to pay for the brain yourselves.”

The family sat silent, stunned by the news until someone asked, “How much does a brain cost?”

The doctor replied, “A female brain goes for \$20,000 and a man’s brain costs \$50,000.”

There was an awkward silence as the men in the room tried not to smile, smirk, or chuckle.

A curious little girl eventually asked, “how come the male brain costs so much more?”

The doctor said, “It’s a standard pricing procedure. We mark the female brains down because they’re used....”

On Wednesday and Thursday evenings, we hosted a group of afghan refugee women who told their stories through a play about their lives and their cuisine.

Historically, afghan woman have been marginalized and accorded subordinate status. During the rule of the Taliban, women were treated worse than at any other time. They were forbidden to work, leave the house without a male escort, or seek medical help from a male doctor. They were forced to cover themselves from head to toe, even covering their eyes. Women who were doctors and teachers were forced to leave their work and sit at home, even as girls were forbidden to go to school.

Perhaps a used woman’s brain is a dangerous thing.

Lest we pat ourselves on the back too quickly, our evangelical Lutheran church has been ordaining women only since 1972....

In leading a workshop years ago, i remember a women near retirement who taught high school English her entire career. In tears, she told me she had always wanted to be a research chemist, but that, in her day, women had only two choices: be a nurse or a teacher.

How do we explain this ongoing story of the subordination of women in light of Jesus’ interaction with this Samaritan woman?

How long have we had this story? Well, john was the last gospel written down, say around 100 ad. So that would make it nineteen hundred and twenty years.

In all that time, we largely have been able to disregard, overlook, and ignore that Jesus revealed god’s relationship with women.

Similarly to present-day afghan culture, Jesus was supposed to observe certain taboos in his interaction with this woman.



When she approached him at the well, he should have courteously withdrawn to a distance of at least twenty feet. But he did not.

How did we miss this?

Social distancing has historically been used to separate one's self from the ritually unclean. And all women were ritually unclean. Part of every Jewish man's prayer in Jesus' day was to thank god that he was not born a woman.

Jesus breaks the social taboo against talking to a woman, especially in a public place without a witness. In village society, a man does not even make eye contact with a woman in a public place. But Jesus engages her face-to-face. Person-to person.

How did we miss this?

Furthermore, as a Jew, Jesus ignored the 500 years of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. He set aside all the bitterness of past history to ask this woman for a drink of water.

How did we miss this?

By deliberately sitting on the well without a bucket, Jesus places himself in a situation where he shows he is in need. In fact, his request for a drink means literally "i am weak and need help. Can you help me?"

A man asking a woman for help! A man exposing his vulnerability to a woman! Unheard of!!

How did we miss this?

Jesus elevates this woman's self-worth. The woman's dignity is affirmed as Jesus asks her to help him from her available resources.

How did we miss this?

Think of all the demeaning words we have for women. And for a woman who has had five husbands. Consider that elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus speaks ill of the divorced, yet here is a woman who has run through five men. And does he have a word of judgment?

Not at all. In a very matter-of-fact manner, he just comments on his highly intuitive understanding of her checkered marital relationships.

How did we miss this?

Finally, Jews and Samaritans did not use common vessels. By drinking from a Samaritan woman's bucket of water, Jesus would be considered an outcast by his faith community.



Perhaps all of this is summed up in the woman's response to Jesus: "why are you, a Jewish male talking to me a woman, a Samaritan woman?"

The answer is contained in Jesus' response: "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."

To this day, too much of American Christianity, the gift of god is seen as a book. And the book has been abused, misused, and mishandled by many.

The bible, mistakenly treated as an answer book, a perfect book, a collection of verses that people pull out to support their personal vendetta. In this way the bible functions as a Rorschach test, reflecting back to us our unexamined prejudices, hatreds, preconceptions, and biases.

This is dangerous business.

Like the guy who was in serious trouble. He closes his eyes, opens the bible at random and sticks his finger on a page. He looks and reads Matthew 5: 27: "and Judas went and hanged himself." The poor guy slams the bible shut and thinks, "This can't be right." So he closes his eyes, opens the bible again and randomly points at a verse. He reads Luke 10: 37: "go and do likewise."

Martin Luther makes the most sense when he declares, "the bible is the cradle in which we find the Christ child."

What this woman is discovering is that the gift of god is not a book, but a person.

How did we miss this?

We missed the radical nature of Jesus' interaction with women because the secular culture and the church bought into the polluted water of power, prestige, and domination rather than the living water of god flowing through the person of Jesus Christ.

Let's face it that for nineteen hundred and twenty years or so just about everyone bought into the notion that women are inferior, the weaker vessel, incapable of making a decision at the voting booth, lacking the wherewithal to be a priest, pastor, research chemist, surgeon, attorney or, god forbid, president.

Really, the best we can do are three old white guys?

Entire church bodies, such as apostolic Christians, old school Mennonites and others grabbed hold of Paul's culturally conditioned statement that women should be silent in church and built their entire church structure around keeping women in their place.



The romans built the largest denomination in the world without female leaders because Jesus had twelve male disciples.

Never considering that perhaps Jesus chose men because we men are less open to spiritual reality than women. Do we consider that Jesus was aware he would have greater trouble reaching the men and so needed to start with the most resistant gender?

How did we miss that the longest conversation Jesus had with anyone in the four gospels is with this Samaritan woman?

Now we want to make sure that we don't make the men the enemy.

Heading to seminary in 1974, i was classmates with some of the first women being ordained. And when they would go out to preach while still in seminary their experience was that the harshest critics of a woman in the pulpit were the women in the pews.

So, as Paul says we fight against principalities and powers. The institutions and the systems. What Walter wink calls the domination system which always needs to marginalize, suppress, and demonize someone.

Throughout history, the bible—the book—has been used to support the enslavement of other human beings, the domination and suppression of women, the condemnation of the lgbtqia communities, whereas jesus—god in the flesh—only had a harsh word for those of the power structure who mistreated the poor, the sick, and women and children.

How did we miss this?

Because we resist drinking from the living water that springs up from the fountain called jesus.

Over the centuries, how easy it has been to walk into christian worshiping communities and walk out again without being changed, enlivening, transformed.

How did we read this story year after year, decade after decade, century after century and think that the only place for a woman is either in the kitchen or in the bedroom?

And what is frightening is that the only rational conclusion from our history is that we must be missing something important revealed by jesus in the scriptures in this very moment.

Clearly, my eyes can be as clouded as anyone, but consider this.

The very Christian people who condemn the gay and lesbian communities often are the same people who ignore the very clear injunction in scripture to welcome the stranger, the sojourner, and the immigrant when they enter your land.



One might sum up the Old Testament ethic as one of hospitality. This is a basic, foundational principle of a Judeo-Christian ethic.

How do we continue to miss this?

We miss the ongoing revelation when we think we already know it.

Women be silent. The disciples are all men. End of story.

And we don't know. We can't fully see the nature of god. We cannot come close to comprehending the mystery at the heart of the universe.

Some of you may be familiar with Dorothy Sayers, who wrote the Lord Peter Whimsy detective novels. She was a colleague of C. S. Lewis and J.R. Tolkien who wrote lord of the rings.

Ms. Sayers was a theologian in her own right, quite a liberated woman for her time, walking around in men's clothes, smoking cigars, and drinking with the men.

She wrote a little book called "are women really human?" In which she concludes: "perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. They had never known a man like this man—there has never been another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged, never flattered, coaxed or patronized, who never made jokes about them; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious.

There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole gospel that borrows its bite from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature.

But we might easily deduce it from his contemporaries and from his prophets before him and from his church to this day.

Women are not human; nobody shall persuade that they are human; let them say what they like, we will not believe it, though one rose from the dead."

And what about the afghan women? CLC will be in conversation with them about using our kitchen in starting their own catering business. They loved our kitchen and our gathering place. Molly rice told me that, for the first time, they were playing their music while preparing food for the play.

Molly concludes, "They're excited for the opportunity to earn a living, a goal that was unobtainable for them in Afghanistan. It's the American dream. They are coming together saying, "we do exist!"



Open our eyes, Jesus, so we can support the full humanity of all those you call your people.

SERMON SONG

PUT A WOMAN IN CHARGE BY KEB MO