

Children's Sermon (well)

(They) hated each other's guts. They did. For what seemed like centuries this group, your group, your family, your friends, your people hated them, those people, those losers, those foreigners....those nothings. (They are) the answer to questions like: who is the last person in the world that you would ever call good? Whom would you never ask for help? Whom would you wish to receive pestilence, shame, guilt, or punishment? Whose help, if you were drowning, would you flat out deny?

Now, you need to understand that the issue of those questions (is not) "them".....no, they speak about the condition of your spiritual-heart and health.

(I love) this scene from John's Gospel. Jesus breaks a hundred social and political norms in just a few sentences, and this becomes John's hinge-pin for understanding the movement that Jesus is beginning.

Trivia point number 8: this (is the) longest recorded conversation involving Jesus in all of the Bible. No other comes even close: no conversation with disciples, no talk with Pharisees, no parable or healing. Nope, and who is it that Jesus chose to talk (with?) A Samaritan. A woman. A total nobody, and "Jesus you need to step away from her before you catch something."

So, I need to get something out of the way. (People) have a way of reading into this story things that are simply not said. She's promiscuous, unchaste, immoral. She has been labeled as a harlot, and often a prostitute.....but those words are found nowhere in this reading. Nor does Jesus say those words: Go and sin no more. It isn't there.

There is, though, Good News in Jesus' assertion that "God even forgives the sins of such a woman." Now, you need to understand that word also applies to you, today. God even....forgives....you.

See, this story is not a stab at human morality much less sexuality, it's not. Early in John's Gospel Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah to a fellow child of God, in whom he sees a serious spiritual-hunger, but also an engaged mind, and a tremendous gift for evangelism, and discipleship. This woman is the total package for the growth of Christ's church, as John presents her! So much for "a fallen woman."

By Jesus' time, the (hatred) of Jews for Samaritans was at an all time high. Samaritans were considered vermin. They disagree on everything: how to interpret Scripture, how and where to worship. They worship in different temples, read different translations of Torah, avoid social contact whenever possible. The bottom line: they hate each other's guts.

Who would we say she is today? (She is) "the other." She is an alien, a stranger, a heretic, a Guatemalan mom. She represented all the boundaries that must not be crossed in one's religious life. She is one big taboo all wrapped up into her complex story. (BUT), Jesus crosses those boundaries and breaks all the cultural taboos. Jesus, God-in-the-flesh according to John, shatters hundreds of years of hatred and separation.

You see, while lots of people would like to make this (story) about sex, it is about scandal, but not sexual scandal. This story addresses the spiritual scandal (that shuts) out the other, or as I asked earlier: who is the last person in the world that you would ever say is "good." The scandal is not in that person's status, but in your spiritual-center....(where) hate and anger are allowed to grow like mold.

We even get a taste (of that) scandal from his disciples when they call him out for speaking to such a woman. But, if Jesus is willing to welcome (this) woman, with all eight-layers of scandal stacked up, then we as disciples are called to do just the same. We are to (put aside) our preconceived notions, our gossip fueled half-truths, our white-privilege, our imagined exclusiveness, and supposed purity.....and look at this Samaritan woman, or Honduran mom with kids....as a sister, and a loved child of God. Your inability to love her and her kids is not on them.....that is on you and your spirit.

(Did you) hear how Jesus connected with her? I'm thirsty, would you give me a drink? I mean come-on. This is God-in-the-flesh. How long was he sitting in the desert's afternoon heat? People die in that desert heat. He could have (gotten) his own water, don't you think? You might hear an echo from his temptation in the wilderness, a few weeks ago, "are you hungry, I you are the son of God and I know that you are, turn this stone into bread." But, there will be one more time when Jesus will thirst at noon....but instead of water he will be given cheap wine turned to vinegar.

Did you notice (Jesus) didn't shame the woman? He mentions a fact that the man she is with is not her husband, but he doesn't criticize her. She admitted that truth when Jesus raised it, and then it is gone. John doesn't extend the drama....commentators and voyeurs do....oooh, let's talk about her sexual self!

In that day women had no stature, no rights. They were property, owned. So this woman could have been a widow, who's brother-in-law was required to take her into his house and family. Maybe there were four brothers...and then that's her 5th man. Or maybe she had a disability. Or maybe she was infertile. Maybe she'd been raped. Or maybe she was abused as a child. John does not seek to blame the victim, nor does Jesus. But, there is something (about our) spirit-centers that so wants to blame her. Whatever her life may have been, she wanted to live invisibly, so she could come and go without comment from the righteous ones of the town. That's why she's here after noon.

Then Jesus (honors.) He sees her whole life, her past, her present, her future. Who she has been. Who she yearns to be. How she hurts. Jesus names them all. He doesn't shy away from the painful, ugly, broken stuff in her life. There's no game-playing, no smokescreens, no deflecting responsibility off upon her neighbors. He says I am the one who can give you life....through living water....now, see who I am.... The Messiah....spirit and truth....living water....drink of me.

Then, I love this part: she gets so excited about what God has done in welcoming her... that she runs back to town....(and forgot) her water jar. Left it right there. And she tells the Good News, and shares her own scars that have met mercy....and (then) says Come and see....

This woman, the first genuine evangelist in the Gospels....a Samaritan (woman,) broken, invisible, and yearning for genuine love....which she receives from this Jewish man, who travels with a questionable group of more Jews.....

Then, the second (miracle)....this Jewish dude and his 12 Jewish friends are welcomed to stay in that Samaritan city. There were no hotels. They would stay in the homes of (people) whose guts they had hated for years! They stayed two days....offering Good News to hearts that hungered for freedom and love. Let that be our legacy....all are welcome.

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