BEING LIKE JESUS MEANS: PROCLAIMING THE MESSAGE

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John 4:5-27, 39-42

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

**Today’s story of the Samaritan woman at the well follows the story of Nicodemus that we reflected on last week**. In some ways, the stories could not be more different. Nicodemus was a respected leader of Israel. The woman was a shunned woman of the hated Samaritans. I can’t stress enough the deep suspicion and bitterness between Jewish people and Samaritan people. The divisions were historical, religious, and political building over a period of 750 years. The Samaritan woman had a questionable past; he was a respected moral leader of his community. He sought Jesus at night; she bumped into him during the day. We know Nicodemus’ name and she will always remain nameless.[[1]](#endnote-1) **He was the ultimate insider and she was the ultimate outsider.** They were the same in some ways, too. Both misunderstood who Jesus was and what he was there to do. Both of their stories are full of irony. John had an ironic sense of humor; can you pick it up in the Samaritan woman’s story?

The set up to the story is that Jesus and his disciples left Judea (the southern part of Israel) and were traveling home to Galilee by way of Samaria. Jewish travelers often avoided Samaria, but Jesus chose to go through there. It’s not hard to imagine that they would get thirsty walking so many miles and that they would stop and rest and “refuel” at the famous well on the route. It is a well, by the way, that is still there and still providing water to pilgrims including several of us from this church who visited it a few years ago.

Read John 4:5-30, 39-42

# THE SERMON

**You know, God really does have a sense of humor**. The day I was writing this sermon on proclaiming Jesus’ message, there was a knock at my door. When I opened the door, there were two Jehovah’s witnesses. I prayed to God, “really?” Then I thought, “is this what proclaiming Jesus’ message means?”

I love that John shares the story of the Samaritan woman as one of the first stories about people who point others to Christ. I love it because she is a total underdog. If someone around Jesus described who would carry out his message, you can bet they wouldn’t have said, “woman” (a woman’s testimony wasn’t even valid in a court of law). They for sure wouldn’t have said “Samaritan” (they were heretics.) And yet this is who Jesus chose to talk to, to share with and ultimately who would bring others to him. It is a “last who became first” kind of moment. **As I said earlier there is a lot of irony in the conversation.** As scholar George Stroup pointed out, the Samaritan woman thinks she can provide what Jesus needs (water), but we all see that he is the one who’ll provide her what she needs (his life-giving presence). She tells Jesus a half-truth about not having a husband, when he not only knows and understands the whole truth about her, but he brings a much deeper truth with him. She assumes he’s a prophet because he knows about her husbands, not realizing he is the fulfillment of prophecy as the expression or Word of God. She tells him about anticipating the coming of the Messiah while the Messiah is standing right in front of her. And to top it all off, she walks off without her jar of water as she goes to offer the Living Water to her neighbors.[[2]](#endnote-2) Boy, do I love this story!

So what can we learn from this story about sharing Jesus with other people? **First, you don’t have to be an expert**. She had an encounter with Jesus, she didn’t know everything about him, but she was still willing to share even without all the answers, “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

**Secondly, she did share what she experienced**. He knew the truth about her and he still accepted her. He still offered her the Living Water even though it astonished his disciples.

**Thirdly**, she didn’t offer Christ to her neighbors through theological arguments or by threatening them; **she talked about her own experience and invited them with, “come and see!”**

**Fourthly, she did not wait until she was perfect before she shared him with her neighbors.** Some time ago, I was really struggling with a place of pain in my life. I felt shattered and certainly unworthy of being one who shared Christ with others. “How can I share you with others when I am so broken myself,” I prayed over and over again. I was at a retreat and at the end we formed a closing circle where they passed a candle around and each person was invited to say something. I had already made up my mind to pass. When the candle was passed to me it flopped around because it was broken. **As I noticed the candle, a thought came as clear as can be in my mind, “Even a broken candle still gives light.”** The Samaritan woman was a broken candle, yet Jesus still came to her and let her light shine for many of her neighbors. Whether we are whole or broken candles, we can all give light.

So what is the message of Jesus we can share? We know his message is grounded in love and that he calls us to love God and love our neighbors. **The question we need to ask ourselves is, “how has he touched my life? How has my faith informed my life?”** My husband was married and divorced before we met. Our love story is a story of God’s gift of new life. And I can attest to the goodness and blessing of that new life. In the midst of this world where there is a lot that is wrong, painful, and broken, we can point to a God who overcomes that brokenness and brings new life. **Sometimes proclaiming that message comes through what we do more loudly than through what we say**. As we saw in the Ethiopian street child’s story last week, that message first came to him through an invitation to the drop-in center, then a shower, and a place to stay. Later, he heard more about Jesus and came to know him more and more. **I think it’s important to let people know that the good things we do in our community and world spring from our faith in Christ and we each must figure out how we do that**. I hear of too many people who think Christians and by association Christ are just judgmental, self-righteousness and mean. It is important that people see that Christians are loving, kind and compassionate as reflections of Christ. There is so much more to his message- Why have you entrusted your life to him? What has touched your life?

Being like Jesus means proclaiming his message. Does that mean we all have to start knocking on doors? I don’t think so. The Holy Spirit speaks in many ways; how can we let the Spirit of God speak through us? **What is a natural way for us to share that we have met Christ and how his message has inspired us?**

With some help from United Methodist Communications, here are some ideas:[[3]](#endnote-3)

1) Rather than trying to convince people with arguments**, listen to their stories and then share yours in return**. The Samaritan woman shared her experience and then invited them to come and see.

2**) Genuinely care about the person whether they are a person of faith, a person questioning or someone who doesn’t believe in God at all**. Jesus said that love is how people will know we are his disciples. Building relationships and trust comes first, then what you share will have greater meaning to them. In our last church, one of the most fruitful groups to share their faith and invite people to church was the hiking group. Their purpose was not to evangelize people, but as they hiked and enjoyed the beauty around them they talked to each other. People from the church and people from the community came together and in the midst of sharing about each other’s lives, the church people shared their faith naturally and authentically. That led some of the community folks to want to “come and see.”

3) **Acknowledge that some pretty awful things have been done in the name of religion, but some incredible things have been done in his name, too**. We need to be honest about our history, but also lift up the positive acts of the church. Sometimes the best we can do is plant seeds and trust God to help them grow.

4) “Disagreements are inevitable when you engage in conversations with people who think differently than you do. Be ready and willing to disagree, and know that’s not a bad thing,” BUT **“disagree without being disagreeable”** – remember love is the character of Christ.

5) **Let your faith come up naturally as you talk about your life**. Mention something you heard, saw or did at church, something you read in a book that was meaningful to your faith, something you are struggling with and how your faith has helped you. Post an inspirational quote or event on your social media. You don’t have to do the convincing, your role is to extend the offer “come and see.”

Jesus shared the love of God in good deeds to be sure, but he also connected those good deeds to the Good News. Being like Jesus means proclaiming his message. Let us learn from the Samaritan woman at the well inviting others to come and see Christ for themselves. Amen.

1. Deborah J. Kapp. “John 4:5-42 Pastoral Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* Year A Vol. 2. David Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, general eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) p. 92. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. George W. Stroup. “John 4:5-42 Theological Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* Year A Vol. 2. David Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, general eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) p. 94. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Clay Morgan. “How to build relationships with skeptics.” United Methodist Communications <http://www.umcom.org/learn/how-to-build-relationships-with-skeptics?utm_source=email-D3802017&utm_term=&utm_content=newsletter&utm_campaign=MyCom-February&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTlRjek1XVTRZalU0TkRnMyIsInQiOiJ4Q1hWc3pjemt3c0FXNWlOemhzODFTRmZcLzF2Z3grZnJkUlFPWXQwM2xiXC9kTmxobkJRY200K28rbFwvZWZvdFhrYlpxNktQY0FxNU8xT0lSZEVLWDlQdkNLcUFtZWQrcjFIMnNWczg5WHowNDExbVdOSDVLOU1rRVVDUE1pV0dLMCJ9> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)