

3-19-2017 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

"Jesus Changes Everything: People of the Light"

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Scripture: John 4:5-42

Last week we talked about how the Gospel of John uses the metaphors of darkness and light over and over again in deeply symbolic ways. For instance, in John Chapter 1 we are told that "the light (Who is Jesus) shines in the darkness and the darkness doesn't extinguish it." Then it says that the world came into being through Jesus--"the light"-- but *"the world didn't recognize the light."*

"The light came to his own people, but his own people didn't welcome him. But to those who did welcome him, to those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, born not from blood or from human desire or passion, but born from God."

Then we went on to look at John Chapter 3 where Nicodemus, a Jewish leader came to Jesus under the cover of night to ask Jesus some questions. And Jesus told Him that in order to enter the Kingdom of God he would have to be "born again," or "born anew," or "born from above." For *"Whatever is born of flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit."* But Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus' teaching. And he ended his conversation with Jesus by asking: *"How are these things possible?"* And then he faded back into the shadows of the night. And night, in the Gospel of John, symbolizes separation from God.

It's not a mistake that John Chapter 4 brings us the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is striking, and we are meant to notice this contrast. Many have suggested that the story of Nicodemus and the story of the Woman at the Well are meant to be read together. Think about it.

Nicodemus is a Jewish Religious Ruler who comes to Jesus at night, and then after a conversation with "The Light"--Who is Jesus--fades back into the night in fear, misunderstanding and unbelief. The Samaritan Woman meets Jesus at noon, at the height of day--in the bright sunlight. Nicodemus is an insider, a leader, a big-wig. He is a man in a man's world. The Woman at the Well is a hated Samaritan, and she's a woman, and women had no social status whatsoever in Jesus' day. In the eyes of the Jews she is a nobody, a half-breed, hardly even human. She, unlike Nicodemus, doesn't even have a name--we are never told her name. She is a religious, social, and political outsider, but she meets Jesus at noon, in full daylight.

And the contrast between the two conversations is even more extraordinary!!! Whereas Nicodemus is unable to move beyond the confines of his religious system, the Samaritan woman moves outside of her religious expectations to engage Jesus in a theological debate.

And, whereas, John 3:17 indicates that Nicodemus is unable to believe that Jesus is God's Son, the Samaritan woman actually listens and hears Jesus say that He is God-Made-Flesh when He refers to Himself by the name of God in John 4:26 by saying, *"I Am."* And while Nicodemus' last questioning words to Jesus expose his disbelief, the last words of the Samaritan Woman lead her to witness to her whole town!!!

What are we to make of this? The traditional way of interpreting the Samaritan Woman at the Well is that she is an outcast, a shamed sinful woman, an adulterer who is forced to come to draw water in the heat of the day by herself--as opposed to when the rest of the women in the village would have drawn water--which would have been before the sun rose in the morning and then again at dusk.

Tradition has compelled us to judge this woman as an outcast in her town. And this may be true. But, the text itself never says anything about any sin this woman has committed, nor does it ever say that Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven, go and sin no more," as He does with other folks in other situations.

With this said, in verses 16-18 we have this dialogue, "*Jesus said to her, 'Go, get your husband, and come back here.' The woman replied, 'I don't have a husband.' To which Jesus replies, 'You are right to say, I don't have a husband. You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth.'*"

It is these verses which have given the most credence to those who say that the Woman at the Well was some sort of prostitute or reprobate. But, back in the day we are talking about, again, women had no rights. Women were considered to be the property of their husbands. So, this woman would have had no control over the fact that she had had five husbands in the past. Perhaps her previous husbands had divorced or simply disowned her. Perhaps they had died. And then she was bought "like property" by the next "husband" who came along. And we know nothing about "the man she was currently with." Perhaps they were betrothed to be married. We are not told.

Rather than pointing out the woman's sins, this conversation works to convince the woman that Jesus is, at the very least, a prophet, and eventually the Messiah because later when she leaves her water jar and runs into the city she says to the people: "*Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done!*"

When the woman tells Jesus, "*I have no husband,*" all we are told is that Jesus is impressed by what she says. And how do we know this? We know this because Jesus says to her, "*You've spoken the truth.*" And isn't this what God requires of us?

We are called to "come to the light," "walk in the light," and to "love the light over the darkness." We are called to be in relationship with God--and "walking in the Light" is symbolic of being in relationship with God...just like "walking in the darkness" is symbolic of being separated from God.

Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, "*the time is coming--and is here!--when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way.*"

Do we worship God in spirit and in truth? Do we trust God enough to share with God what is going on in our lives--sins, warts and all? Do we want to be in relationship with God enough that we are willing to "come to the light"?

Remember what Jesus says in John 3:16-21: "*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him...This is the basis for judgment: the light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than light, for their actions are evil.*"

All who do wicked things hate the light and don't come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. Whoever does the truth comes to the light..."

Do we believe that God so loves the world--even me, even you? In 1 John Chapter 4 we are told that *"God is love,"* and that *"There is no fear in love..."* Do you suppose that Nicodemus headed back into the shadows after talking to Jesus because he was afraid? Is this why so many people do not come to Christ--because of fear?

Again, Jesus says that those who don't come to the light *"don't come...for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light."* If God is love, what is there to be afraid of? God isn't out to get us!!! God isn't waiting, hiding behind the bushes, getting ready to jump out and "get us" as soon as we make a mistake or do something wrong!!! God isn't out looking for blood!!! God isn't dangling us out over the flames of hell--with a devilish grin on His face--just waiting for the right moment to drop us into the pit. *"God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him."* What could be better NEWS?

Jesus said, *"No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. You are my friends..."* Do you know that God loves you that much? Do you know that no matter what you have done--no matter where you are in life, no matter who you are--You can come to the Truth and the Truth will "set you free"!!!???

Jesus went to the Cross to set you free. God came and died so that you can be in relationship with Him!!! And the fact that Jesus is in Samaria right after He proclaims that God so loves the world--just pushes the point that "the world" means EVERYONE!!!

Boy, does this passage preach?!!! We could take so many angles. This sermon could go on all day, all week, into eternity!!!

It's interesting that the Samaritan woman, like Nicodemus in John Chapter 3, has a hard time understanding what Jesus is talking about at first. Jesus offers the woman "living water." Her response? *"Sir, you don't have a bucket."*

Jesus answered her: *"Everyone who drinks this water will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."*

And "The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!'" She doesn't get it. And who would? She doesn't know that Jesus is using "Living water bubbling up into eternal life" as a metaphor for what happens when a person believes in Jesus and the Holy Spirit makes them a new person. But this doesn't cause her to walk away, mumbling, as Nicodemus did: *"How are these things possible?"*

And when the woman says to Jesus, *"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will teach us"--*Jesus says to her *"I Am--the one who speaks with you."*

And it's at this time that Jesus' disciples come back from their lunch and are "shocked that [Jesus] is speaking with a woman." It doesn't say they are shocked Jesus is speaking to a sinner, or a prostitute, or an adulterer or even a Samaritan--but a woman!!!

And they say, "*Rabbi, eat.*" And when Jesus tells them, "*I have food to eat that you don't know about,*" they are completely puzzled. "*Has someone brought him food?*" they ask each other. But Jesus sees something they do not. Jesus sees that the fields are ripe for harvesting--and that is so much more important than food. And just as the disciples did not even begin to understand that Jesus is the "Bread of Life" until they too, invited others to "Come and see," the Samaritan Woman doesn't fully understand just who Jesus is until she leaves everything behind--in this case her water jar--and runs into the city and says to the people: "*Come and see... Could this man be the Christ?*"

And you know? The fact that the townspeople listened to this woman indicates that she might not have been the "outcast" or "hated prostitute" that so many theologians down through the ages have perceived her to be. For in verse 39 we are told that "*Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word...*" They must have thought of her as a trustworthy person. Perhaps we've gotten it all wrong throughout all the centuries. Perhaps this Samaritan Woman was a leading figure in her community--not unlike Nicodemus.

After the people of the town had spent some time with Jesus they said to the woman, "*We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world.*" In any account, everyone in this story fulfilled what Jesus proclaimed in John 3:16-21. They all came to the Light, believed in the Light and became "Creatures of the Light," or Children of God!!!

The Gospel of John uses the images of light and darkness to declare eternal truths. When we hear the good news about the "Light" of Jesus Christ, do we shrink back into the darkness like Nicodemus or do we drop everything we are doing and go running into the city, the town, the neighborhoods telling everyone we can, "Come and See"?