



Sunday, March 19, 2017

In today's story, Jesus engages the Samaritan Woman at her well in Sychar.

She's an outlier, a woman for one thing. What is Jesus doing talking to a woman? It's not considered at all appropriate. And a Samaritan. Not a real Jew.

In the event, he's engaging her for her own sake, not his. He has the water of life. He isn't recruiting her to be a proper Jew, or for his organization, for example.

We are concerned with recruiting for our organization. Of course, church finds its life in Jesus, so we are really doing this for the sake of others also. We want the water for ourselves and all the thirsty ones out there. That is why we are having our Angel classes after church. It's one of the big reasons that Bishop Smith came to visit with Vestry last week.

We are looking for people who aren't really part of The People, those already connected to a spiritual community which gives them enough to drink, but rather the unchurched, a growing population, something like almost 40% of the Millennials, the alphabet people. And there are others, people like ourselves who haven't found what we have. Can we do something for them? Do we have something to offer spiritually.

Well yes we do in a variety of ways. Others do also.

There is plenty of competition, but I would like to suggest that we have an edge, because we are struggling valiantly with the major modern issue of patriarchy while the biggest competitors, the biggest Christian churches, are not.

This means that we Anglicans, at least for the most part, are trying to understand and act in accord with Jesus example. We see it exemplified today with the woman at the well, this story in John's gospel, where woman outlier from the power structure is treated with respect as well as mercy.

She isn't the only one.

When Jesus is invited to lunch with the pharisee. You remember. In Luke's Gospel. A canaanite woman comes to him, anoints his feet with her tears and perfumed oils in a gesture of thanksgiving for divine forgiveness. The Pharisee is horrified by this association. Jesus says: she who loves much is forgiven much.

Or, how about the Canaanite woman in Matthew, whose daughter needs Jesus' healing, and he says: why should I give the children's bread to the dogs? You get that. Why should I give the good things meant for Jews to lesser people? And the woman responds. "Even the dogs are allowed the crumbs from the master's table". O.K. says Jesus. You got me.

Jesus treats outliers, and especially women, with complete dignity as well as mercy.

Often, they've come to him, hoping that, though probably unlikely, this will be true. And it is.

And they respond with love.

Of course, Mary Magdalen loves him. And Mary and Martha. And his Mom. And there are others mentioned. Joanna.

It is the women who follow him, the Maries, his mother, Magdalene, one of the other ones, all through the night of the passion. They stand with him at the cross. The other disciples are gone. They stand with him. And it is Magdalen who goes to the tomb at first light, and encounters the angel.

And they go before him to Galilee.

So it shouldn't be any surprise that women are prominent authorities in the early church. Junia, 'of note among the apostles'. Magdalen 'apostle to the apostles'. Many mentions of deacons and presbyters. The leaders' of Paul's house churches; Priscilla and Acquilla.

So what happened? The Great Image of church disempowerment is the Babylonian Captivity. Luther and Calvin use it frequently to describe the church of their day.

I think it fits to describe a church which has disempowered and in some ways excluded over half the human population for most of its history. We are just breaking through today, although let me be conservative about this. It is nothing new. It is what Jesus had in mind from the beginning.

Now there is a weight, I know. It is the gossamer weight of freedom. It is the burden of uplifting spiritual power for others. It is the authority of those who have not earned their authority or fought successfully for it, but accepted it as part of the definition of who they are, fully human beings, beloved of God, with all the spiritual gifts and strengths that implies.

And as our church, in this time and place, walks out of the captive Babylonian place, we, among all the rest of our brothers and sisters, can point clearly to the gospel of Jesus Christ as good news for all, men and women, Samaritans and Canaanites and their equivalent. We have a gospel that lifts up the whole of humanity, in all its wholeness.

Halejula

Amen

**THE REV. JONATHAN B. PERCIVAL**