

1.27.2019 Epiphany 3 (John 4:1-14)

Our sermon this morning begins with a poem titled *Heaven's Surprise*. A man named Rod Hemphill wrote these words:

I was shocked, confused, bewildered as I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all, nor the lights or its decor.
But it was the folks in Heaven who made me sputter and gasp--
The thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics and the trash.
There stood the kid from seventh grade who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor who never said anything nice.
Herb, who I always thought was rotting away in hell,
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine, looking incredibly well.
I nudged Jesus, 'What's the deal? I would love to hear your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here? God must've made a mistake.
'And why's everyone so quiet, so somber - give me a clue.'
'Hush, child,' He said, 'they're all in shock. No one thought they'd be seeing you.'

In our second lesson this morning, the historic account of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, we see an example of one of the folks in Heaven who would make a self-righteous person sputter and gasp. As we consider this Samaritan woman, who was living in a way that caused her to be an outcast even among outcasts, we are reminded of the way God relentlessly pursues the lost, the rebel, the prodigal, calling every one of us "*out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:9). Long after we would have given up on the thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics and the trash; long after we would have left them to rot away in hell, our Lord and Savior has only just begun to manifest the infinite, inexhaustible, amazing grace of God in His pursuit "*to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). Thanks be to God for *Heaven's Surprise*. Thanks be to God for the unimaginable truth that "*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8).

Our Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman is often presented in a way that focuses our attention on our thirst for Christ. Many sermons correctly emphasize the life-changing, life-giving, *living water* which our Lord offers so freely to this undeserving Samaritan woman, and to all the unworthy who

seek Him, but today instead of directing our attention to the way that the Son of God satisfies our deep spiritual thirst, let us consider the only reason any person thirsts for God: The reason we thirst for union and communion with God is because God thirsts for union and communion with us. Evidence of that surprising, miraculous truth is found throughout Scripture, and in our Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman we discover His thirst for us to be both human and Divine.

Consider the way this story begins by emphasizing the fact that Jesus is fully human. The Gospel of John is often recognized for its unique focus on the Divinity of Christ, and its beautiful description of Him as the Divine, Preexistent, Word of God who already *was* in the beginning (John 1:1), but John begins this passage by telling us that Jesus was in the middle of a three day journey, that the Eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity was walking (God was walking) from Judea to Galilee, and when He reached Jacob's well He was "*wearied from His journey*" (John 4:6). Not only was the Creator of Heaven and Earth physically exhausted, He was thirsty, so He sat down on the well and seeing this Samaritan woman, her Creator asked her for a drink (John 4:7).

John presents us with subtle evidence about Christ being fully human in order to boldly proclaim the glorious, yet heart-wrenching truth of God's Divine plan. You see, the lesser truths that John communicates about Christ's humanity (the fact that our Lord was on a journey that left Him tired and thirsty) point to the greatest truth (the truth that the Infinite Word of God in human flesh can not only get tired and thirsty, He can suffer, and bleed, and physically die to atone for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2:2). This truth that John presents in the story of the Samaritan woman is seen even more clearly in his account of the Crucifixion. John quotes the last five words that Jesus spoke from the Cross in this order: Jesus said, "*I thirst*" (John 19:28), and He declared, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Once again, it is in Jesus' real, human thirst that we see the evidence of His humanity, and His words make me wonder, as He hung there in my place, as He hung there in your place, did He think of that day in Samaria, and a cool drink of water from Jacob's well?

As one who in His humanity was like us in every way except sin (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus, a dying man said, "*I thirst*" (John 19:28), and once again the

evidence of His humanity is followed by the miraculous truth of His Divinity. When the Incarnate Word of God, the same Word spoken at the creation of the world, proclaimed from the Cross: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30), the statement was a sovereign declaration by God Almighty that the work of the redemption of mankind was complete. The Divine Son of God assumed human flesh, lived in perfect obedience from His human birth in a manger to His human death on the Cross, and with His work finished, God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand, and now mankind may rest in the blessed assurance that the God-man, Jesus Christ, the only One who can truly sympathize with your every weakness, is the Word eternally spoken on your behalf in heaven.

Consider your past, humbly confess your faults, "*turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 20:21), and like the Samaritan woman and all the thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics and the trash, thank God for *Heaven's Surprise*. Thank God for the way He loves the lost, the rebel, the outcast. Thank God for choosing to take on human flesh, human sorrow, human thirst, and human death to the end that He may manifest the unsearchable depths of His Divine thirst for you, His Divine love for you, and His Divine plan for the Salvation of the world (John 3:16).