

12.29.2019 First Sunday After Christmas (Matthew 11:25-30)

The last time our study group met, we spent our time together considering the biblical account of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. On that day we talked about many things, but our discussion centered on two persons. One of those persons was Christ our Lord, the God-man, the Infinite, Almighty, Omnipotent Creator of Heaven and Earth, who stepped down from His heavenly throne, took on human flesh, and at high noon on that particular day was so hot and tired from His journey that He sat down on this well to rest. As the One True God, who became fully human to save humans (Philippians 2:5-8), sat down on this well to rest, He saw this Samaritan woman and He asked her for a drink.

The Samaritan woman was the other person we considered that day. After prayerfully contemplating the content of the story, we came to the sad conclusion that there was only one reason for a woman to be at this well in the hottest part of the day. She was an outcast, and what's worse is the fact that she was a Samaritan outcast. She was an outcast even among the outcasts. For her, the hottest part of the day was the safest part of the day, for it was much easier to endure the blazing sun and the scorching heat than it was to suffer through the rude remarks and the judgmental expressions.

In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we learn that she'd been married five times and was now living with a man who was not her husband. We aren't given enough details to know for certain what caused the end of any of these relationships, yet when you consider the fact that it was almost impossible for a woman to divorce in that culture, but not so difficult for a man, it leads you to at least consider the possibility that she'd been discarded by five husbands. It very well could be that like damaged goods, she'd been thrown out time and again, and this difficult chain of failed relationships may have brought her to a place in her life where the sinful, shameful way in which she'd been treated by others had led her to stumble into sin as well.

When I listen to this story that took place two thousand years ago, and try to see things from the perspective of the Samaritan woman, when I really try to walk a mile in her shoes, I'm reminded that the more *things* change the more

*we* stay the same. So much has changed in the last two thousand years, yet this common human experience remains which dates back to a time well before you or I or the Samaritan woman. From the moment that our first parents fell into sin, up to this day, the experience we all share is one in which we find ourselves being hurt by others, and hurting others. We are all both victims, and victimizers. This is a human condition that dates back to the Fall of mankind, and while we may not have experienced the heartache being cast out of society after five failed marriages, we all have some knowledge of how this woman feels. We know she feels broken, empty, and exhausted, because at some time in our life, in one very personal way or another, we've all been in her shoes. We've all had to endure what can accurately be described as the blazing sun and the scorching heat of our own faults and failures, as well as the painful effects that come from the faults and failures of others.

It is in these moments especially that God meets us at the well. It is in these moments that Jesus speaks these comfortable words found in our Second Lesson: *“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30). In every generation God has spoken to His people in this way in the midst of their faults and failures. In the Garden of Eden, God called out to sinful Adam, and after hearing the confession of our first parents, God said, “Come unto Me,” by providing an animal sacrifice so that He may clothe them, cover them, and care for them (Genesis 3:21). In the story of the Samaritan woman, the Light and Truth of Jesus Christ completely exposed the faults and failures of her exhausting life, yet in Him, perhaps for the first time ever, instead of condemnation, what she found was an invitation to “Come unto Me.” Jesus invited her to come and drink from His well of living water, water that springs *“up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14). And here, in this church, every time we meet for Holy Communion, after confessing our sins and receiving absolution, the first words we hear are the comfortable words that our Savior Christ says unto all who truly turn to Him: *“Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”*

To the hurting, to the broken, to all who are overwhelmed by the weight of

sin, our Savior says, “*Come unto Me.*” The God who became fully human to save humans has intimate, first-hand, human knowledge of the trials and sorrows of this world. Have you been rejected? So was Jesus. “*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not*” (John 1:11). Have you been tempted? So was Jesus. “*After fasting forty days and forty nights...*” in the desert, the enemy came to tempt Him (Matthew 4:2-3). Are you sorrowful? So was Jesus. “*Jesus wept*” at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). Have you been betrayed? So was Jesus. Judas betrayed Him with a kiss (Matthew 26:49). Have you ever felt abandoned by God? In His humanity, so did Jesus. From the Cross He cried out, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46).

On this first Sunday after Christmas, as I consider Jesus alone on the Cross, or resting on a well in the hot desert sun, or as a babe lying in a manger, I’m struck by the thought of God showing up in humble, human flesh in places we’d never expect. Bring to mind an image of God the Omnipotent crucified between two thieves, or the Creator asking the creature for a drink, or the One who sustains the universe sleeping in a feed trough. While it’s easy for us to imagine a distant god, one who keeps himself carefully separated from all that’s wrong with this world, it’s not so easy to comprehend the truth that the One True God has revealed Himself to be “*Immanuel... God with us*” (Matthew 1:23). God with us when we’re rejected. God with us when we’re tempted. God with us when we’re weary, and sorrowful, and heavy laden.

In the darkest and most difficult parts of our lives Jesus says, “*Come unto Me.*” “*Come unto Me*” and I will clothe you, and cover you, and care for you. “*Come unto Me*” and you will know the perfect Love for which you’ve been so desperately searching. “*Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you*” with living water that springs up into everlasting life.