

**The Reverend Heinz D. Raidel
Message Third Sunday Of Lent
March 12, 2023**

Prayer

So might as well start by acknowledging the obvious

- I am back from my second knee replacement
- I am good, of course I have the same issues with PT I did before
- But God is good, all the time, and I will be ok
- And I would like to thank everyone who has sent cards, called, and texted.

So in the process of recovering from two knee replacement surgeries

- I have had a lot of time to read, write, and think
- and I was thinking about my faith as we all do
- and I came to the conclusion that the thing I like most about my faith is that it is a faith for imperfect people
- in other words Jesus reaches out to imperfect people.
- the gospel reading for this morning, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, is a story of Jesus reaching out to an imperfect person
- and it's my favorite Jesus story or parable

I like the story because

- first** I think we can identify with the woman
- because she has so much going against her
- she is just a mess, like some or most of us
- second**, I like the story because Jesus reaches out to this messy woman
- third**, I like the lesson that if Jesus reaches out to the messy woman, he also reaches out to us.
- fourth**, mostly I like the idea of the woman changing up her life and living differently because she met Jesus.

As I mentioned, this “woman at the well” is my favorite Jesus story.

- and it gets better the more I read it and read about it.
- it is still a story about Jesus reaching out to us
- but it is also much more than that

-and that is where the good news and faith and life lesson is for us today.

Start with a little backstory, (I have mentioned this before)

Note Jesus is talking to a woman in this story

- significant because Jesus, as a Rabbi of that time would generally not speak to a woman
- also significant that this conversation is the longest Jesus has with anyone in scripture - and it is with this **woman**
 - and about now I need to take you on a quick tangent in regards to this woman and her place in this story
 - please read and see her as a woman of a culture 2000 years ago
 - please don't go modern with this and shame the woman
 - yes she has had quite a few husbands
 - but that is probably not her doing
 - by law of the times she could not have divorced her previous husbands
 - so most likely she has been widowed and remarried
 - and if she is not married at the time of the story, she is probably living with the guy for survival,
 - and for all of those reasons, don't give her a black mark, don't make her a pariah
 - because even though it may seem by our standards she has a sketchy past,
 - according to her situation and times, she is not due shame or scorn, rather she is due compassion
- and Jesus shows her compassion
 - as he reaches out to her

Now, it's also significant to mention the woman in the story is a Samaritan.

- for some time, Jews and Samaritans have been bitter enemies
- they live next to each other, and they worship similarly
 - there are some differences between Samaritan and Jewish worship
 - major difference is that Samaritans' holy place is on a Mt Gerazim (not Jerusalem)

- and I should mention that a little over a hundred years before this story takes place
 - the high priest of the Jews took a small army, burned the Samaritans capital city, and destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerazim.
- in spite of, maybe because of this history and division
- Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, reaches out to this unmarried Samaritan woman
 - at a well
 - at noon

And this is where it gets interesting.

- and first century Jews would have known/remembered
- in Gen 24, a servant of Abraham found Isaac's wife Rebekah at a well, "at a time when women went to draw water"
- and in Gen 29, Jacob meets his future wife Rachel at a well. "At a time when they went to draw water"
- this what we call a recognizable pattern, (water, wells, and weddings)
- and when Jesus mentions the Samaritan woman's husband and or husbands.
- at this there is no question that the early Christ followers and Jews would have sensed a wedding theme
- and they would have recognized and known that significant weddings are more than two people being married, they would know often weddings join and /or restore families
- okay, with me so far?
- the next question and answer then, is who is getting married, or who and what are being restored at this well situation?
- the answer in this case is Samaria and the Samaritans,
 - the five husbands Jesus mentions easily refer to the five rulers of Samaria
 - or the five groups which traditionally are believed to have formed the Samaritans
 - and this wedding scene is Samaria and their God
 - and to make the point clear Jesus explains to the woman that soon all people will worship together

-And then something really, really interesting happens in the discussion Jesus has with the woman

- (understand that Samaritans believed in the coming of a Messiah)
- the Samaritan woman says “I know Messiah is coming”

-and then Jesus says “I am” for the first time.

- (there are 7 or 9 I am statements in John)
- (the “I am” statements are Jesus assuring someone that he is the Messiah)

-this is the first time Jesus says clearly that he is the Messiah

- and Jesus makes this statement (the central statement of our faith) (that Jesus is the Messiah)
- to a Samaritan, and to a Samaritan woman.

And this is where this little scene from a well 2000 years ago becomes a faith message and the good news for us 2000 years later.

First I want to remind us what the Samaritan woman did when she realized Jesus was the Messiah

- she went back to her people and shouted it out loud (the Messiah is here)
- and she became the first evangelist ever
- think that's trivial?
- well, consider it was the women (Mary's) who first found the stone had had been rolled away and Jesus was indeed resurrected on the first Easter
- those women did the same thing, they ran to their people and shouted the good news of Jesus' resurrection
- why is this good news? It's good news because it shows Jesus chose women to share His good news and it destroys the modern myth that women should not or cannot serve any position in the church of Jesus Christ
- and it opens up the hearts of any and every woman who has felt the call to serve - it tells them the Spirit is talking to them and their call to serve is real.
- this story does not just enable women to serve Jesus in the church

-it validates and empowers women to serve Jesus in the church

And there is more good news for all of us in this lesson...

Much has been made of the status of the Samaritan woman

- truth to that
- she is at the bottom of the ladder
- she is a mess
- she is imperfect

And this imperfect mess of a woman is the person Jesus chose to reach out to in order to share his good news

- this is a common theme in scripture
- Jesus came for us with imperfect lives and issues
- Jesus is here for those of us with imperfect lives and issues

The good news and the truth of Jesus' life is that he brings a new way of life,

- a way that results in all people women and men,
- Samaritans and Jews,
- outsiders and insiders
- all worshiping in Spirit and in truth.
- This gospel becomes life changing for the Samaritan woman's neighbors when she tells them about the Messiah,
- this gospel becomes life changing for all of us when we live into Jesus' promise to bring us all together,
 - to join us again where we divided ourselves
 - and to give us all the blessing, hope, promise and redemption that the long ago meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well reveals

God is good, all the time.

Word. Amen.