

3rd Sunday in Lent: Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42; Psalm 94

If you were to walk up to someone and say, “You have no idea what you are doing as far as your faith in God is concerned, but I understand everything about faith in God, and so only my understanding can teach you how to be saved,” ...this is not a great approach to evangelize. Unless you are Jesus. Today Jesus says to the Samaritan woman: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” And so, correct me if I’m wrong. This is either an arrogant thing to claim or it is true. And since Jesus is neither arrogant nor a liar, this is true. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, that she did not know what she was even worshipping and the very people she disliked were the ones through whom she could receive the knowledge of salvation. Which means a word about the reason for the tensions between the Samaritans and the Jews is in order. The Samaritans occupied the country formerly belonging to the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh after the ten tribes of Israel were captured by Assyria. Which means people from the surrounding cultures came and intermarried with the remaining Israelite population and the area became known as Samaria. These Samaritans worshiped the idols of their own nation, but at one point being troubled by lions, they determined that this particular tribulation was a result of not having honored the God of that territory, and they welcome a Jewish priest to come and instruct them about the Jewish religion. But what resulted was a hybrid religion, a watered-down faith, because the Samaritans accepted the first five books of the Bible, but they rejected the prophets, and also believed in other gods. And so can you imagine a situation where a religion would accept only the parts of scripture that they agree with while holding to the idea that they can also practice any form of worship they so choose because any understanding of God is good, meaning there is no absolute truth? But so, can you imagine this? Well, this is the situation with the Samaritans. They embraced a religion that was a mixture of Judaism and idolatry, and it is for this reason that the Jews despised the Samaritans and vice versa, because nobody likes to be told that they are wrong. Especially when it comes to matters of faith.

But Jesus is correct in saying salvation is of the Jews. We are told in scripture that God chose to bless all nations of the earth through Abraham, who was a Jew. And we are told in Romans that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles

of God. Which is true. God gave the law to the world through the Jews to teach us of our need for salvation. The law proves that we all fall short of the glory of God, for where there is no law, there is no transgression, but when we know the law, we see we all fail to keep it if not outwardly, then inwardly. For this is what Jesus taught us. And so the law is good, for if we don't know what it means to sin, we don't know of our need to be saved. And God outlined what sin is for us through the Torah and the Ten Commandments given to the Jews. But also through Jewish prophets God pointed out our failings and promised to save all people through Messiah. In addition, it was through the teaching of twelve Jews plus the Apostle Paul, who was also Jewish, that the world received the Gospel. Jesus said to his Jewish disciples right before the crucifixion that he would send *them* the Spirit of truth saying to them and I quote: "when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth...He will glorify Me by taking from what is Mine and disclosing it to you." God's Holy Spirit disclosed the truth of Jesus to the Jewish disciples. And that knowledge is what we call the New Testament. And the New Testament teaches us that Jesus, a Jew, died for our salvation. And so, Jews gave us the law, Jews prophesied against sin and about redemption, and a Jew died for our sins, and Jews spread the Gospel; and so, when Jesus says salvation is of the Jews, if you don't like that because it sounds exclusionary to you, take it up with God. Here's His phone number: (show hands clasped in prayer).

But this understanding is important because otherwise, we might be able to accuse Jesus of being arrogant and exclusionary today in making this strong statement to a Samaritan. But what we are really seeing is God loving this woman so much that he is unafraid to share with her this truth. He is way less concerned about offending her and way more concerned about her eternal salvation, and so he tells her the truth. And he spends two days in the Samaritan streets telling them the truth. And I believe he spent this time as an apologist. An apologist is not someone who feels bad about their faith apologizing for it as if it is unfair or exclusionary, an apologist is someone who defends the faith because in its narrowness it is universal. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world *through him*." That's John 3:17 and we just read that scripture last Sunday.

There is only one reason that God does not condemn and is able to save the entire world, and that reason, is Jesus Christ.

We, like Jesus today in our Gospel, need to be not only unashamed of preaching this Gospel, but we also need to know and understand the apostolic teachings in order to defend our faith so that people, like the Samaritan woman, who have smatterings of all kinds of beliefs and understandings and perhaps even animosity towards our faith, will hear the narrow truth and be saved.

Which brings me to the next matter. And that is I was recently told by the Bishop, of a Masters in Divinity program that is available through the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. And it is offered online which means I could remain here in my role as Vicar yet study to receive this Masters Degree. And I wasn't certain that I should even apply to be accepted into the program given such an effort would require a good deal of time. Since time is the most precious thing that we possess, I have hesitations about devoting that much time to learning for fear it might take away time I can spend loving. Loving my community and my God.

But I decided that if I don't apply, the door is shut; yet if I do apply, and if I were to miraculously be accepted, I then have time to discern if it be what God would have me do. All that being said, I would like to take the liberty of sharing one of the two essays I am required to submit to be considered to be accepted. And I share with you today a portion of my answer to the second question because I answered it using today's Gospel reading.

The portion of the second question I am answering using today's Gospel reading is: Provide your vision of the Church moving forward and what the Gospel offers in contemporary contexts:

My vision for the Church moving forward is for believers in Christ to be both salt and light in the world. In particular, as Episcopalians who are but one denomination in Christ's larger Body, I believe we are good at being salt, but we back away from being light. Meaning in the same manner as salt, we are devoted to coming into contact with our hurting world to make a difference for the downtrodden, but my observation has been that outside of our dedicated walls we hesitate to proclaim Jesus as Savior which is what I would equate to being light. My vows as a Daughter of the King include prayer, service, and

evangelism yet even within our Order, the emphasis is on the first two while dancing lightly around the latter. I believe our church can do better at the latter. We can reach across our postmodern pluralistic societies in the same manner Jesus did with the Samaritan woman at the well when he extended living water that she may never thirst again. In order to save the Samaritan woman, Jesus reached across not only race and gender but also her soiled marital reputation or “sin,” and even her “religion” given she saw Jesus’ mode of worship as a barrier by stating Jews worshipped in a different manner than the Samaritans. Despite these differences, Jesus spent two days in the Samaritan streets proclaiming himself to be the Messiah, the Living Water of eternal life, after which we are told that because of his word, many believed Jesus to “truly be *the* savior of the world.” That Jesus is the savior of the world *is* the Gospel message. Yet in our desire to be all things to all people, we have slacked off on proclaiming the singularity of this truth in our contemporary contexts.

What the Gospel has to offer in our contemporary contexts is salvation from sin and death. Who upon hearing that eternal life is possible would not want it? People may doubt it be possible or may not agree with how it be possible, but we would be hard pressed to find someone that would not want eternal life if it be possible. In large part, as a Christian community, we are very good at offering a cup of cold water to the thirsty, but apart from the Eucharist we are not good at offering that cup in Jesus’ name. The cup must come with Jesus attached to it or we be saving bodies only and never souls. Faith without works is dead yet works without proclaiming faith is also dead. We love to say that God loves all of us and draws all of us toward God no matter who we are, no matter where we come from, no matter what we look like, no matter what we’ve done, no matter how we worship; but we shy away from asserting that the manner through which we are reconciled to God is *solo Christo*.

Different paths may open different people up in different ways to receive this message, but I see the need for our Church to boldly continue her commission to preach Christ crucified, resurrected, and returning so that people have opportunity to hear of God’s provision for sin, death, and eternal life. Our misstep as part of Christ’s Church is that within her walls, we lean on our liturgy to say this message for us when we should be saying it in the streets. As a

denomination I feel we are quick to hit the streets to bandage the broken, but perhaps out of fear of being labeled exclusionary we shy away from proclaiming belief in the One who is able to save us from sin and death. Yet Jesus spoke out in the streets to proclaim this very truth across culture, condition, and contexts with the response being that people believed and were saved.

I believe proclaiming Jesus as *the* savior of the world is the Good News we should bolster and not back down from; for I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). Hence, my vision for our Church moving forward is that she be not only Christ's hands and feet but also Christ's apostolic apologists. This reprioritization would bring revival...given people are dying of thirst.