

Sermon

Last week, we heard the story of Nicodemus and we heard of the works of water and the Spirit. While the readings read today have got richness, reminding us of Christ from whom we can get the life giving water and God who knows our needs and provided water for the children of Israel out of what would seem like an impossible place, the rock, today I want to focus on the gospel according to John only. We have a story that is full of surprises amongst them, a woman who I would like to believe is coming to teach us many things that probably many during her time would frown on.

But let's set the scene. We are told that there is a Samaritan woman at a well and in enters Jesus, a Jew! Let's pause here. These two groups don't see eye to eye. If we rewind time, these two groups were one people with a common faith, heritage, and devotion to Yahweh.

They are both Hebrews with Jews coming from the old southern kingdom and Samaritans from the old northern kingdom of Israel. What makes them different is that when the northern and southern regions of Israel split, Samaritans (the 10 tribes of Israel that had banded together claiming Samaria as their capital) inter-married losing much of their ethnic identity.

When the Jews who had been in exile in Babylon came back, there were massive ethnic divides with Samaritans looking down on Jews while Jews could not comprehend why the Samaritans had intermarried thereby changing their religious practices due to varying cultural influences and were no longer worthy to call themselves Jews. So they have been living with this ethnic divide since before and after the death of king Solomon.

There is reference to Jacob and Jacob first met Rachel at this well resulting in marriage. Jesus however is coming with a different proposal, a proposal of reconciliation.

So, Jesus is a Jew and the woman a Samaritan and guess what, the so-called enemies engage in a conversation. This is broad day light and, in that day, and time not only are they supposed to be enemies, by virtue of one being a man and another a woman, they are not supposed to speak together. She dares and engages with Jesus. She is the woman, so, of the two she, is the one who would have been taught to walk away, to avoid conversations alone, that it reduces her worth and yet she defies that.

Brothers and sisters may I suggest to you that this woman is coming to challenge us to challenge some of our inherited 'norms' in our homes, our workplaces, our churches. There are certain things that we for a long time have held on to, certain beliefs that if we really and truly want to look into them, have no meaning or even do not add substance to our lives but because our forefathers or even elders within our contexts had hatred for the 'other' and so we have inherited it without cause.

Not only that, but the woman also goes on to ask questions! Some of us were raised to only speak when we are spoken to. To agree so as to cause 'trouble'. To go with the status quo but here is a woman who does not just nod at what Jesus is asking and telling her. She asks for

clarity, for understanding and ask again. My brothers and sisters we are living in a time where going with the flow is no longer the 'wise' thing to do. Following the crowd can get you killed.

We ought to be curious, to seek clarity. Why are we doing this? Who is it going to help? to what end? We have people in power whose interest is to pad their pocket and they will use you and me to do it unless we use our voices, our choices wisely. History has already told us we can no longer believe what we are being told even if they make campaigns and broadcasts and they dress fancy because once they get what they want we, the people are the ones to suffer, to live with the consequences.

Growing up, I remember my mother always saying, 'Basa mangwanani' meaning one must act early before time expires. What this looked like in real life was that we wake up at dawn, pray, sweep, wash, clean, bath and sometimes by the time it is 9am everything around the house has been done, the clothes that you handwashed are even almost dry.

The Samaritan woman goes to draw her water at noon. This is the point in the day when it is the hottest. The other women would have gone early in the morning because this is the time to meet with friends and other women, to share the gossip because there are no phones let alone Facebook, twitter, Instagram, or an email with the latest news. They go early while it is still cool to do all the work and carry the 5/10 litre jars of water on their heads. So here she is at a time when you would not think you would meet a woman at the well.

This I propose suggest that she is a woman with her own mind, independent, a woman who for whatever reason is alone if not lonely because she is by herself when she meets Jesus, a woman who is brave because considering what we have heard of her, she still shows herself in broad daylight but also strong to do such work in the heat.

Brothers and sisters, may I present to you that the Samaritan woman teaches us courage. For those of us who have felt alone sometimes, for those of us who don't fit in, for those of us who are true to who we are that we need to walk with courage, to not run away to stand firm because I want to believe it takes courage to do what she was doing when she meets with Jesus and I want to believe that wherever we find ourselves God is there ready to meet with us, to strengthen us, to give us his spirit, to give us his truth, to give us his life giving water to drink.

The Samaritan woman having had that encounter with Jesus, despite her situation and that this 'stranger' has exposed her saving her, she doesn't think of how bad probably the community she lives within looks at her after all she has had five 'husbands', is alone at noon in the heat at the well, she runs back to testify, to say come and see, to be a witness for many others to believe and be saved and have this living water. She is generous in her heart that even if they might not have room for her, she has room for them.

My brothers and sister, may I suggest that the Samaritan woman is teaching us that no matter what they did to you, how cruel they were, how angry it made you feel, 'kill' them with kindness. Even when you know they said an unkind word to you, say kind words to them, pray for them and smile at them. Even when they refused to help you when you were in need, when they are in need, be there to help them.

God calls who he calls and uses who he chooses to use. It doesn't matter what you used to do or what you did last night or even this morning. If he calls you, if he is asking of you to spread the good news, I hope like the Samaritan woman you leap, you say yes. God's call is not for the perfect, the saved. He called Saul who was persecuting Christians and so he can use you. Nothing was a drunk and still was used by God. Moses was a murderer and still used by God. God can pick anyone even off our high street and use them for his kingdom.

My brothers and sisters, to us who are 'perfect' the Samaritan woman is coming to show us that God is able to use even those whom we have labelled as sinners to spread the Good News of Christ. They might have been a thief, but God can still use them, they might have been a woman of the night or cheated but God is still able to use them to save someone's life or even yours. They might look different or make different choices in life, but God can still use them. Had the people in Samaria had chosen not to listen to her testimony, they would have missed out on this life-giving water that Christ gives.

Our God is a God who redeems, and this lent is calling us back to him, to be reconciled with him. Religious Jews when going to Jerusalem would take the longest route just so that they could avoid being near Samaria for Jews had nothing in common with the Samaritans. Jesus should not have been anywhere near Samaria being a Jew. But he clearly had a mission which sees a Samaritan woman and people from the Samaritan city becoming believers.

Jesus has a mission with each and every single one of us, he is calling us to him to be reconciled. He is reminding us that if only we dare, if only we have the courage and reminding us that it doesn't matter where we have been, what life choices we have made, when we drink from the cup, we are being given new life, that he has gone to the cross and salvation is ours because of what he did more than 2000 years ago.

Will you choose to believe him today?

Sermon Rev Tariro Matsveru

Sunday March 11th, 2023