



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

February 24, 2008

3 Lent, 2007

During these Sundays of Lent, we have as our gospels the longest conversations that were ever recorded, between Jesus and individuals. Last week we had the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Next week we have the man born blind being given back his sight and the long conversations between Jesus and the Pharisees

The week after is John's account of the raising of Lazarus.

This week we have the conversation between Jesus and the Woman at the well of Samaria.

We read this today and it really is no big deal; Jesus talking to a woman. But in the time of Jesus it certainly was a big deal.

Women were very much second class citizens. The rabbis used to debate whether or not women had souls. Women had almost no legal rights. To divorce a woman, a man had simply to write a letter saying he divorced her and that was it. Women took no part in religious ceremonies and in the temple they were not allowed past the court of women. An orthodox Jew thanked God each day that he was not born a woman.

The rabbis never saluted a woman in a public place even if the woman was his own wife.

Added to all this, Jesus was not only speaking to a woman but she was a Samaritan.

To the Jews there are 3 classes of people.

Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans. Gentiles were all those people who were not of the Jewish faith. The Samaritans were a 3<sup>rd</sup> class of people who also laid claim to be true descendants of Jacob. There was a hostile and sometimes violent relationship between Jews and Samaritans. In fact, later in the gospel, Jesus is given the lowest insult when he is accused of being a Samaritan possessed by a demon. (John 8:48)

So here is Jesus, talking to a woman who is a Samaritan. The conversation begins when Jesus speaks to her.

When his disciples come she leaves and goes and tells all her friends in the village to come. As these people are coming Jesus tells his disciples to lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest." In this time of Lent we are asked to travel an inward road of self examination. Part of that self examination is how we look at other people especially those who are different from us. We are asked to look not through our own eyes but the eyes of God.

I believe that when we look through the eyes of God we see people as we have not yet seen them through our own eyes.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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What we see is a world that is being filled more and more with people who are desperately lonely. People who are seeking someone to talk to. People who need someone to listen to them. People who need a little reassurance that they are cared for and needed.

We find more and more people who see the church as being the place where judgment is passed rather than the place where sins are forgiven. A place where one is dragged into the kingdom out of fear rather than drawn into the kingdom by love.

A place where one is beaten down because of sinfulness rather than raised up because of forgiveness.

We see a world where the language of violence and hatred is spoken so freely because of differences; religious differences, cultural differences, sexual differences, ethnic, tribal, educational, economic and so on and so on. We live in a world like this and we are asked by God not to look at the world through our own eyes but through God's eyes.

When we look through the eyes of God there is hope for all people, there is joy for all people, there is love for all his children, there is a place in his kingdom.

The more we are intentional about looking through the eyes of God, the more that Christ will say to us lift up your eyes. Lift them up wherever you work. Lift them up where you live. Lift them up where you shop. Lift them up wherever you are, because when you lift up your eyes and see God's world through God's eyes you will see how the fields are already white for harvest.

Amen

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