

March 12, 2023

John 4:5-30,39-42

“Reading the Classics: Shameless Love”

One of life’s more confusing experiences is when you are in a conversation with someone and you are talking *right past each other*. We certainly have lots of opportunity for that these days – but I would point out *this dynamic was present* when we read about Jesus and Nicodemus last week - and also in Jesus conversation with the woman at the well this week.

In both cases, **questions came from people who seemed to be in control**. Nicodemus was respected as a religious leader questioned Jesus. an upstart rabbi viewed with suspicion. The woman at the well had a bucket for getting water and Jesus had none. Nicodemus asked **for literal and manageable explanations of God’s reality** and the woman pointed out **her bucket** put her in the driver’s seat. Jesus answers pointed out reality is not what it seemed...in both cases.

We are not surprised that Jesus would be willing to converse with a learned teacher of Israel who came to him with questions. But this week Jesus goes to hostile territory - starts the conversation himself – and speaks with someone who isn’t respected by anybody.

Funny thing though, the conversation **with the Rodney Dangerfield of the ancient near east** – the woman who got no respect – is far longer than Jesus’ conversation with the man regarded as wise. Her objective reality was bleak. And yet, Jesus began a conversation with someone who was the wrong gender...the wrong nationality...the wrong religion and who had more failed marriages than my friend who is a cat lady has cats.

The disciples certainly thought they had left him out in the sun too long when they came back to find him in conversation with a person of that description. What I want to know is – how does Jesus manage to have this conversation with her about **taboo and personally painful subjects** and *not shame her into silence and cause her to withdraw*. We aren’t very good at that. How does Jesus do it?

The first thing Jesus does which we want to learn how to emulate is **he sees her**. Jesus may actually be thirsty – but **the first thing** Jesus does is see her. He understood that everyone who was accepted in the town came to get their water

in the cool of the morning. He doesn't have to have divine insight to know it is painful to be mistreated by others. He also knows **she will never** talk to him...so he speaks to her, in all her woundedness.

It has become commonplace for Americans of differing viewpoints to **not** see each other. We see a perspective, or a position on an issue and decide if we like it or not. *We don't see the person* – we see their perspective and treat the person accordingly. Having put each other in boxes and questioned one another's patriotism and intelligence, **it is almost impossible for us to see each other**. *God in Christ really sees us*. Being more like Christ means we will value seeing one another over strengthening our position.

Jesus sees her and talks to her. Yet, he doesn't really give any ground. He doesn't say to the Samaritan woman – you are right and I am wrong – he sticks to his Jewish guns, so to speak – but doesn't stop there. He knows the arguments – but **he keeps talking**, because he is *more interested in her* than the argument.

Jesus sees her, talks to her and, most important, loves her. **This is the reality which overwhelms all the walls we build between us**. The day is coming, and is now here, Jesus says, when *it won't matter* where you worship or with what label – but it will be done **in spirit and in truth**.

Of course, **treating people as we believe Jesus would treat them may come with push back**. It certainly did for Jesus. President Carter has been in the news lately because he is going on hospice care. And once you have been president there are always people who like you and don't. But way before the oval office, in the 1940's – attending the naval academy – Jimmy Carter incurred the wrath of many of his fellow students for befriending the only person of color in the school. Wesley Brown would be the first African American graduate of Annapolis in a time not known for progress in civil rights. But there were people who wanted to do the right thing...and while it was difficult daily – he was not left alone, and he succeeded. To the joy of some and the consternation of others.

Taking Jesus example today to *see people*, to *hang in there* with them and *love them enough* to not only know them but *reveal ourselves to them* is not for the faint of heart...but **it may well be for the faithful**. Like Jesus, let's love shamelessly.