

## **Joyful Praise | Psalm 95; John 4:5-42 | LUMC | March 12, 2023**

Dear Church family and friends: in the last week we encountered Jesus in Judea, the Jewish territory where he had gone to openly preach to his detractors. These were the Pharisees who were trying to dig a wedge between Jesus' and John's disciples because they wanted to create disunity. While in the area, Nicodemus, one of the Pharisee leaders, approached Jesus by night to hear the message of salvation. Nicodemus was a scholarly elite—wise, rich, a socially, economically, and politically influential figure. Yet Nicodemus relinquished his status to seek Jesus for the salvation of his soul. It was not easy to come down to this lower level and listen to Jesus. Jesus pointed the elite to a curious aspect of the human psyche—one must be like a kid to enter eternal bliss. Or, be in a forgiven state to acquire a ticket to eternity. Jesus was comparing earthly life and eternal life, and urged humans to forgo their personal interest to align with God's interest for humanity. God wants us to recognize our frailty and seek the salvation that never ends.

Today we encounter Jesus moving away from predominately Jewish territory—Judea. This was the Jews' religious headquarters in Galilean country, which was a heavily Gentile region. Jesus had invited the Jews to the reign of God but they stubbornly refused. With no hesitation, Jesus proceeded to invite the Gentiles and the liberal Jews living in Samaria into the reign of God.

The first convert was a woman of lower status. Today we would call the Samaritan woman, a social misfit, or the ne'er-do-wells of society. Sadly, the ancient people divided themselves into lower and higher status, just as we do today. Jesus was never—and is never—pleased with these categorizations. He wants people to form communities of faith where everyone feels welcome. This is what unchristian leaders in every congregation try to dismantle, causing divisions seen today as US versus THEM. The people of faith feel the tension whenever unchristians among them hijack any religious organization.

Jesus sat at Jacob's well and the Samaritan woman met him coming to fetch water. The woman never greeted Jesus but proceeded to get water. Jesus initiated a conversation, but the woman rebuffed him because she recognized Jesus as a Jew. She thought Jesus wanted to humiliate her and find fault because she didn't go to worship God in the Jerusalem temple. She did not observe all the Jewish cultural laws regarding dress and food codes. She worshiped God at Mount Gerizim. While at the well both she and Jesus could see the mountain. This woman lived a mixed cultural life—partly Jewish and partly Gentile. This mixed life caused the Jews to consider the Samaritans as half breeds.

You can feel her resistance to open up to a stranger. She was guarded and strongly opposed to engaging with a foreigner. She was even sarcastic. When Jesus talked of having flowing water that quenches thirst forever, she wondered how that is possible because he had no bucket to draw water from the well. When Jesus pointed

her to the better water, she proceeded to praise their ancestor, Jacob, for digging the well that continued to provide enough water for her and her community of Sychar.

Jesus could see the conversation was going nowhere. The woman was not going to relent. Jesus finally told her the time was over for people to choose between worship on the mountain or in the temple. He said that people should “worship in spirit and truth.” She opposed it saying that type of worship will happen when the prophesied Messiah comes. The woman was partially a Jew; she knew Isaiah’s prophecy.

Jesus was now ready to reveal his Messiahship. Jesus went on to tell her to bring her family to listen to the Messiah’s word of salvation. The woman was forthright and said she had no husband. Jesus’ response was the “straw that broke the camel back.” He affirmed her honesty and stated that she had been married five times and she was living with a man not her husband. She felt guilty being fully seen by Jesus and confessed her sins and asked if she could call the entire city to hear the message of salvation from the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Jesus agreed, and the people of the city met Jesus at the well and invited him to stay and preach to them. Jesus stayed in the city for two days and the entire city was saved. Amen!

Do you wonder why the disciples interrupted Jesus’ conversation with this woman? Most of the disciples were Jews. Perhaps they were also being influenced by their inherent culture that prevented them from mixing with the Samaritans. Perhaps they were protecting Jesus from being mistaken by the villagers as another man wooing this loose moral woman. Perhaps they were concerned about Jesus’ wellbeing. He had not eaten anything the whole day. Or perhaps they wanted to keep moving on with their journey to a bigger city where they would rest for the night. The disciples’ motive to shorten Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman is not clearly known. However, Jesus reminded the disciples why God sent him to earth and asserted that their mission was that of being like harvesters. Jesus observed that the people of Sychar, and consequently all of Samaria, would be amenable to the Good News, in contrast to receptions he had received in Jerusalem.

In this narrative Jesus wants us to know there is no hiding place regarding our private lives or what we do in secret. Jesus sees and knows our secrets. Jesus invites himself into our lives. Jesus does so despite our resistance. He will come and make us uncomfortable to speak out what we do in the privacy of our homes or businesses. Jesus wants us to be people who “worship in spirit and truth” and not double-deal with our faith to please others, nor exchange our faith with what does not last forever, including marriages.

Jesus came to bring harmony in the human community that was dividing itself into classes, race, and political affiliations. Jesus invited the Samaritans to live with the Jews peacefully. Jesus encouraged those who believe in him to forgo their hatred of others who do not look like them, who do not practice the same faith or live in same standards. In Christ gender is not an issue; race is not an issue; status is not an issue. What matters is being found faithfully following Christ and doing the mission of Christ.

When the sinner is saved, the past guilt and shame goes away, and a new life of faith starts. The Samaritan woman became a new creature. She became a missionary to her city, to the people who knew her, to the people who indirectly isolated her, making her feel secluded, devalued, and unloved. Yet when she met Christ and repented of her sins, she became a crusader to her own people—the very people who knew her well, the people who may not have had room for forgiving yet. But Christ convinced them, and allowed a repentant woman to live by the power of example. She invited the whole city to experience the Messiah’s love. She told everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have done!” This reminds me of my first experience of salvation and how I actively began testifying to everyone including my grandma. When Christ enters one’s life, fears are gone, and courage is restored. The desire to share the message of salvation is undeniable!

The disciples moved with the same courage, spreading the message of salvation. And ultimately, we are the byproduct of their faith. Most churches are afraid of closing because members are not doing mission work. There are some Christians who resist sharing the Good News. Maybe others feel still locked in a sinful life. Jesus may have spent days asking most of us to get out of our comfort zone and witness for him. Do we want to be Christ-like? Let us do Christ’s mission.

Last week and this week Jesus mentioned food twice; he is asking us not to be overtaken by our physical needs. Jesus does not want us to waste precious time managing the kitchen and food line but rather feel impelled by Christ’s call to win souls. Jesus today is saying that despite our status whatever it may be, we are called to be good Christians and good missionaries.

When Christ’s message of salvation becomes the life we live, we can join the entire Sychar city of Christians saying, “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.” He is the only one to believe and rescue us for eternal life. The Psalmist asks us not to harden our hearts but enter a joyful life of praise like the Samaritan women and share that life with others. The SAMARITAN woman is a living example to emulate. Let us forgo human shame, fear and doubts and jump into mission.

Amen.