

Samaritans Encounter the Messiah

Sunday School Lesson

John 4:21-42

April 28, 2024

Our lesson today begins with a story about high school reunions. I did not attend our ten-year reunion and had no plans to attend our twentieth until one of my fellow journalism classmates who was now editor of the local paper wrote an editorial about the reunion and wrote that I was the one classmate he wanted to see. So I went,,,and he did not come.

In an article in *Psychology Today* entitled “Should You Go to Your High School Reunion”, Dr. Laura Martocci provides ten things to consider before you say no to that invitation. Reason # 5 is this: Remember: High School Reunions are not in the business of redemption. I have certainly experience that. One classmate was avoiding me and when I asked why, she told me. I was a self-righteous jerk who she felt shamed her for not going to church every Sunday. (Her parents often worked on Sunday.) Well, yes, I did know that about myself and apologized. But there was a redemption aspect to our reunion and it was about race. Our class lived through desegregation – those parts that were done right and the parts that were not handled well. We all agreed that we sacrificed so things would be better for our children only it has not turned out that way. School are still segregated – legally now. We have not learned how to play well together. Racism still exists.

The Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus turns out to be just like a high school reunion. He knows everything about her. Most of all, he knows how much shame she carries. She felt so much shame that she came to the well in the heat of the day so she would not have to interact with anyone rather than come in the cool of the early morning when the other villagers were there. In this exchange between Jesus and this Samaritan woman, a miracle occurred. A heart was changed and it changed an entire village.

Let us pray

O Holy God and Creator of the Universe, thank you for being present with us this week. Open our hearts to hear your word so we may be faithful disciples who are known by our love for one another and for our neighbors. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement: **To explore what it meant to call Jesus, as the Samaritan woman did, the “savior of the world”.**

Read John 4

The Scripture passage for this lesson actually begins at verse 21 which leaves out a major part of the story. Our lesson’s author tells us she is glad it starts at verse 21 because it then leaves out all the sordid details of this woman’s life. I totally disagree with her on this. Yes, we can focus only on the Good News but skipping out on the first twenty verses leaves out the fact that the Good News is meant for everyone. Yes, Jews had a bias against Samaritans for many reasons. First, they were considered half-

breeds. Why? During the exile of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and the southern Kingdom to Babylon, it was common to have the victorious countries move their own citizens into the captured territory. The Jews not taken in this area ended up intermarrying with the people that moved in from Assyria. This was not the only reason for hostility between Jew and Samaritan. There was a much earlier issue and it had to do with worship.

When the Northern Kingdom of Israel split from the southern Kingdom of Judah after the death of Solomon, the Northern Kingdom decided to establish a different location for central worship so Eli established a rival sanctuary in Shiloh. Now let me share with you something from Sandra Richter's studies in the *Epic of Eden* series. In studying the tabernacle and later, the Temple in Jerusalem, God's presence was in the Holies of Holy, the inner chamber of the Temple that contained the Ark of the Covenant. While God seemed to be fine with the country splitting, God was not fine with the Northern Kingdom establishing their own house of worship where God's presence was not there. It is this fact that is referred to in the exchange between Jesus and the woman in verses 19-20. Jesus understood the question but Jesus also knew that one day, the Temple would be irrelevant to worship because the way to God would be through the Son. Jesus also knew the Temple would soon be destroyed which it was about forty years later.

An Effective Witness

If Jesus had encountered a respected woman or a Samaritan priest, would their witness have been as powerful? I doubt it. What made this particular woman so powerful as a witness was her story. Yes, she was known in this small village as a woman with a reputation. And they knew of her shame. She avoided people. She stayed away from community events because she felt unwelcomed. Now she comes running back into the village talking to everyone! Her shame was gone. Her heart was full. Whatever she experienced had changed her life and it made people curious. What could cause such a miracle? They had to go see and hear for themselves.

The village welcomed Jesus and his disciples and they remained there as guests for the next two days. Talk about real miracles. A woman had her life restored and an entire village welcomed a bunch of Jews as their guests. One of my favorite lines from *The Chosen* is in Season One, Episode Seven. Matthew is the tax collector in Capernaum and of course, he is despised by all other Jews, including many of the disciples. When Jesus tells Matthew to follow him and Matthew leaves his tax booth to accept, Simon grabs Jesus and asks if he knows what he is doing. Jesus reminds Simon that Simon had questioned that when Jesus called him. Simon goes to argue that the situation is different with Matthew. Jesus says clearly, "Get used to different."

Let us pray:

O Holy God, may you be glorified in my life. May we glorify you in our church through all its ministries. Teach us to walk as children of light even when we face darkness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.