

Samaritan Women

March 12, 2023

John 4:5-42

If you could pick a word or phrase to describe our current place in space and time, what would you pick? As tempting as it was for me to just use Merriam-Webster's 2022 "Word of the Year," "gaslighting," as my answer, I couldn't bring myself to it, because I believe that we don't even need a whole word to describe where we are at present. All we need is a suffix: "-ism". No suffix is used as much today as that of "ism", as in "racism," "sexism," "ageism," "ableism." While the Right cries "patriotism" for their love of country and the way they act out of that love, the Left cries "nationalism" for those same thoughts and actions. "Right Wing Evangelicalism" is being pushed back against hard by Christians of all denominations due to its support of, if not complacency towards, many of the aforementioned "isms." However, though differing in their subject matter, their targets, each "ism" has an inherent similarity: each one of them creates a schism, a divide, between "us" and "them," a schism that arises out of nothing less than fear; fear of what would happen if we let "them" join and be a part of "us," fear of those who are different in some way, fear of the "other."

And make no mistake, there is something we can do about it, individually and collectively. Very truly, we all have Samaritan women in our lives, a person or a group that we look down upon and consider "other," as part of "them" and not "us," potentially for reasons we may not be able to quite explain, and we're not alone. Many in our world choose to be like the disciples, seeing the Samaritan woman in their midst and feeling this deep-seeded disgust, asking questions not unrelated to those that crossed the disciples' minds: "How dare Jesus treat a woman, one who was second-class in their eyes, with respect and compassion?" "How dare he treat a Samaritan, that "other" sect that has their heathen set of beliefs, as an equal?" Like the disciples, it's so very easy to dislike a person or a group because they look different, act different, believe differently, love in a way we can't quite understand. We all have Samaritan women of our own makings, myself included, and society says, "That's okay." However, God's Word teaches us that this is not okay, and perhaps that's why Jesus' words and actions are so profound.

Jesus grew up in the same culture as the disciples. He knew the Samaritans as "other." He knew women as "less-than." He had the support of his culture to walk up to her, spit in her face, and condemn her. If he had done that, the disciples would have not batted an eyelash. And yet, he doesn't. Where he had the opportunity to further divide, to give life to the schism between "Jew" and "Samaritan," he doesn't. Where he had the opportunity to embody the divide between "men" and "women," to exert his God-given power over her, he doesn't. Rather, he bridges those gaps. He teaches her about "living water," a lesson one might assume would be reserved for the Jews, for God's chosen people. He speaks to the woman as if she is family, as if she is one with Jesus. Therein lies the point: despite what Jews and Samaritans think of one another, both are God's children and therefore equals in God's eyes. Despite the separation of power between men and women, both are God's children and equals in God's eyes. Despite knowing her lust-filled past and present, and even admitting as much to her, telling her he knows about her sleeping around, he speaks to her not as one who is to be despised and scorned, but as one who is forgiven and loved. Despite who she is, what she is, what she has done, Jesus treats

her as a child of God, a message he later delivers to the disciples. Notice how he speaks of the Samaritans in the village they are passing through. He speaks of “harvesting the field before them.” He uses no language of “weeds” or “crops;” just “harvesting.” The Samaritans are “crops,” just like the Jews. They are children of God, just like the Jews, and therefore are to be loved rather than hated.

Then again, therein lies our challenge. We live in a time of “ism,” a time of great divide between the “us-es” and the “them-s.” It is so very easy for us to be like the disciples, to trust the status quo, to let culture define who is “us” and “them,” define how “we” are to treat “them.” It’s very easy to cast aside others when society backs those words and actions. However, as Christians, as followers of Christ, we are not allowed to just “go with the flow.” Jesus definitely didn’t “go with the flow.” He turned the status quo on his head and swam against the current. Likewise, we are challenged to be like Jesus, to “swim against the current.” In a world where “phobias” lead to “isms,” we are to be the bridge builders, the peace makers, the repairers of the breach and the new trend setters. Where there is hate, we are to love, even those “Samaritan women” in our midst and of our own making. Those who are hated, we are to show the love of God. Thus, this passage asks a very important question, one that I invite you all to consider as you go forth today and every day: Can you find it in your heart to love all God’s children, even your Samaritan woman?