Sermon A little respect goes a long way Pastor Kit Greaves July 25, 2021

Pray

Five times. Five times the woman’s been married. What would you think? The theme song from the 1952 classic movie High Noon, starring Gary Cooper, Grace Kelly, “Do Not Forsake Me, O My Darling,” could well have been the anthem of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus discerned had been married five times before.  She had loved and lost enough to have earned a reputation which made the women of the village shun her from their communal water-drawing circle at dawn and dusk, when the day was cool.  As one commentator put it, “Only mad dogs and shunned Samaritans go out in the midday sun.”

Jesus the Jewish Rabbi, was out of his comfort zone too. In speaking to the woman, he was breaking a whole scroll of religious and traditional taboos.  The Gospel writer John, who highlights Jesus’ humanity as well as his divinity, only references the taboo by, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans”.  An understatement, if ever there was one!  A product of Post-Exilic, puritanical xenophobia, the tone of Jewish religion of Jesus’ day, had become extremely exclusive.  Women bore the brunt of the exclusion ([See Ezra 10](http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=167946428)). John writes, “Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon” (v.6) was not too tired to reach into his deep well and show the woman respect by actually speaking to her. The conversation between the unnamed woman and Jesus begins with mutual vulnerability. This is such a contrast to King David’s encounter with Bathsheba, his disrespecting her and her marriage and eventual arranging for the murder of Bathsheba’s husband, his best soldier Uriah, some would call what David did “rape.” Bathsheba words to David, “I am pregnant.” In the Gospel story, Jesus is tired and thirsty and the woman is tired of being mistreated, considered property and of worth only when married to a man and she needs the water that only Jesus can provide. That is where truthful conversations must start — from a place of respect, of reciprocal vulnerability. By the simple act of acknowledging the woman, speaking to her, making him vulnerable to charges of being unclean, he makes a connection, begins a conversation. This shows respect. His statement about needing a drink is not a pick-up line. Not a put down. Not a power game. Perhaps for the first time in her life, a man sees this woman as a person, not an object. Equal vulnerability, equal sparring partners. Perhaps she thinks, “I could engage with this one.”

In a verbal shoot-out under the scorching sun, the Samaritan woman ducks and weaves like a good defensive gunslinger.  In keeping with the all too human way we defend ourselves from shame and blame – had she been widowed, divorced several times likely because she was barren? With few rights in Jewish society, viewed only as property by men. And so, she left to fetch water on her own at noon, shunned by the other women of the town because no one would want her bad luck to rub off on them - this shunned, hurting woman goes on the attack. She fires from the hip with a hail of historical, theological, and sociological arguments in an attempt to hook Jesus into a messy cat fight and thereby mask the deep pain of her life, a Samaritan smoke screen, pain that might otherwise be exposed to his compassionate gaze in the blazing sunlight.

Jesus respects her intellect, her questioning, and goes with it.  Rather than attack or defend, Jesus simply holds her in a space, with lightly cupped hands, if you will, where he acknowledges who she is and then declares who HE is despite her ritual and religious “unworthiness” for such an epiphany. He drew from her truth about her broken relationships, mistreatment, poor choices. She drew from him truth about him being the Messiah, the Christ, restorer of dignity, healer of cultural, racial hatred; from mutual respect, Jesus gives her a gift, an amazing revelation, revelation even the male disciples or Jewish leaders had not been privy to.

The Woman says: “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” 26 Jesus replies, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Isn’t that all any of us need for our healing? A space, unbearably hot as it might be, where we can allow ourselves to acknowledge who we are, and in that moment be graced by a Saviour who does not turn away from our shame and failure, but who floods our failed lives with his quenching living water?

Watching this sun-drenched scene, I notice how the woman leaves the redundant water jar.  She didn’t ever draw Jacob’s stagnant water, did she? But then she wasn’t thirsty anymore, was she?

I also notice how she goes back to the very people of her village, who have judged and jostled her, and owns who she is in front of them, because, despite her failures Jesus’ thirst-quenching encounter has given her a sense of being validated as a human being.

There is something very “Resurrection morning” about the way this Samaritan woman leaves the deep gaping well, (is the well a symbol of her deep and dark wounding?) Like the women leave the empty tomb on the first Easter morning, she leaves her empty pail, having emptied her hurting heart, she goes back to the city to proclaim, **29**“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah.” Could she not be calling out, “I have risen from the dead!”?

I suppose this event from Jesus’ life is different from the movie Western “High Noon.”  This Middle-Eastern High Noon has life pouring from the desert sands, where most Westerns end with blood seeping into the sand.  Is that because the “victim” is no longer the human woman, but the inclusive Jewish rabbi, who allows his blood to be spilt to end the shaming, and blaming as he gets caught in the Cross-fire?

It's nearly noon on a summer day and before we saddle up and move out, is there an acknowledgement we need to make about ourselves, show ourselves a little respect, whether we too like Jesus in the noon day sun are tired, tired of expectations we have of others have of us, or that we have of ourselves, tired of our sin or the pain we put up with? If there was ever a need for a conversation with Jesus, a respectful listening to his Word, listening to Jesus say to us, “Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest,” it’s today. If King David’s encounter with Bathsheba shows how NOT to treat women, Jesus turns things around and shows us HOW TO Treat women, how to treat anyone. RESPECT. I was walking back from the Snack booth in the Stadium in Kingston Jamaica when I said to a fellow spectator, What go on? He looked at me and said, one word, “respect.” From vulnerability to valued, from respect to something greater, revelation. Because he is Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour, I am not forsaken. I am loved. I am his beloved.

Three applications of the teaching on living the kind of respect Jesus shows people, especially the marginalized:

1. Google StopHT. StopHT is a website with information about Human Trafficking in Durham Region, a much larger problem than you might expect. Seek more information, pray about it and act on where the Lord leads.
2. Send Canada’s New Governor General Mary Simon a note of congratulation through your MP’s office. ON July 6, 2021 PM Trudeau announced that Mary Simon will be the representative of Her Majesty The Queen in Canada. Ms Simon will be Canada’s 30th Governor General since Confederation, and the 13th Governor General appointed by Her Majesty during her 69 years on the throne. Throughout her distinguished career, Ms. Simon has been a tireless advocate for Inuit rights and culture, and the rights of all Indigenous peoples.
3. When talking to someone about why you watch church online or attend in person, consider telling them this story of Jesus and the woman at the well. His welcome of her is our model of how we can welcome others, to show one another respect, ask great questions which she does but keep the focus on Jesus.

At high noon or any other time of the day, as Aretha Franklin sang, it’s amazing how a little RESPECT goes a long way. And how a revelation can take you home.

If you haven’t already consider signing your personal pledge toward implementing the TRC’s Calls to Action, included in today’s email.

First woman of First Nation origin to be appointed Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon

https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-gg-mary-simon-1.6091376

First woman elected as Chief of the AFN Assembly of First Nations. Roseanne Archibald https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/roseanne-archibald-afn-chief-election-1.6093144

Respect for Humanity. Restored Divinity. Saviour Jesus.