

Confess!

3.19.17

John 4 -

For the past few weeks we have been exploring our baptismal vows and striving to live into our baptismal calling. So far we have been challenged to:

> RENOUNCE the spiritual forces of wickedness...REJECT the evil powers of this world and REPENT of our sin.

> ACCEPT the freedom and power God gives us to overcome EVIL, INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION - IN WHATEVER forms they present themselves.

This morning, we come to the vow asking us to CONFESS Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole TRUST in his grace, and promise to SERVE him as our Lord, in UNION with the church which Christ opens to people of all ages, nations, and races?

This morning, our scripture is a familiar story. Maybe it is too familiar. You know the story.

Jesus is on a road trip with the disciples. He becomes weary as they enter a Samaritan village. He decides to find a nice rest area on the journey. The disciples, meanwhile, continue onto the nearest city to find some refreshment.

While Jesus is relaxing, He notices a woman coming to the well. It is hot. One might wonder: *Why would she be coming to get water at this time of day?*

The woman does not seem to pay any attention to Jesus, yet He engages her in conversation by asking her for a drink...

At this point, the conversation gets a little sticky. He tells her to get her husband, which of course, she does not have. And then she discovers that He knows everything about her. At this, she realizes she has met someone quite amazing! And she is ready to begin a new life.

She is so convinced that she tells everyone in her family and her village about Him. and before long, many in this community believe as well.

What a beautiful story! A story of acceptance, love, compassion, transformation, witness.

And yet, it seems that so often this Woman of Samaria is looked down upon.

Dawn Chesser...suggests that this story reveals a depth of theological and spiritual understanding. *“Although many scholars have portrayed her as not just uneducated, but the worst kind of sinner—divorced multiple times, of loose morals, and a follower of the wrong religion—I think it is important to notice how intelligent she comes across in this conversation with Jesus. She really holds her own!”* (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

In her book, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, Bonnie Thurston notes that:

The Samaritan woman is, in fact, one of the most theologically informed persons in the Fourth Gospel. She knows the regulations about ritual purity (verse 9), ancestral traditions of Israel (verse 12), the necessity to worship at a valid temple (verses 19-20), and the expectation of a Messiah (verse 25). She is, in short, conversant in Samaritan theology, and Jesus takes her as seriously as a discussion partner as he did Nicodemus chapter 3. (Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, Bonnie Thurston notes in (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998; pp. 83-84)

Thurston goes on to propose that ... “the Samaritan woman (is) the fullest and most confident example of a true believer. Not only does she hold her own in a difficult and complex conversation, but in contrast to Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness, she (talks with) Jesus at noontime, out in the open, at a public well, and in the full light of day!” (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Imagine that you are at the well and Jesus is engaging you in deep theological conversation. What might He ask us?

Chesser suggests that... “our answers come not so much from what we say, but from how we live.”

What is amazing about the Samaritan woman is that, not only does she accept Jesus as the Christ, but she shares this experience with others. Chesser says,

“In doing so, she becomes the world’s very first Christian missionary. By the end of the story, we learn that because of her testimony about what has happened to her and ‘because of her word,’ others have come to believe in the good news of Jesus Christ! (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

So, what led to all this? What made her “confess Jesus as her Savior, put her whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as her Lord?”

Jesus invited the Samaritan woman to drink the Living Water. He spoke of spiritual and eternal matters in metaphors. Birth, bread, water, harvest...

The woman thought that she would be freed from having to draw water at the well every day... and to face the heat of the day or the ridicule of others.

Jesus invited her to a new life. A new way of relating to others. A fresh start. A new perspective. A new way of living. Beyond intellectual assent or belief, it was a changed life.

The woman at the well accepted and believed in Jesus because He told her everything she had ever done. He spent time with her - listening, caring, loving. He valued her as a person. He offered her Living Water.

The Samaritan woman chose to live a new life. And she shared this news with her village and many believed.

Because of Jesus’ love, her life was forever changed.

Because of her witness, many believed.

Do we confess Jesus as Savior? If so, what does that mean for how we live? How do we serve others in His Name?
What about the Living Water?

In his new booklet, *The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church*, author Mark Stamm makes a direct connection between our responsibility to the world made in our baptismal vows and the living water Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman at the well:

“We take up the baptismal calling of the church to intercede for the world, and to continue to live more deeply into the mind of Christ. In the lifelong pilgrimage with the church begun in baptism, we discover again and again that our purpose in life is deeply tied up with giving ourselves in service to others. In baptism, we step into the flow of living water, and in it we experience, now, already, a foretaste of heaven.” (*The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2017))

I like how Chesser puts it: “As those who have confessed “Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promised to serve him as Lord, in union with the church Christ opens to people of all ages, nations and races,” our experience of drinking the living water is the same as that of the Samaritan woman It is life changing. It is deeply satisfying in a way nothing else is.”

But “Not only is our experience the same; our mission is the same as well.” When we have “tasted the living water” that springs up to eternal life, “we become compelled to offer that water to others.” The way we do that is “By our testimony, both with our words and through our self-giving actions.” Amen. (Chesser)