

## SERMON – 21 FEBRUARY 2016: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

(John McFadzean)

READING: John 4:1-26

The text verse for my reflection is verse 14 *"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"*.

Jesus lived and taught in Palestine in the first century. In order that we understand the text it is important that we understand the setting. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen race and did regard anyone who is non-Jewish a DOG.

Apart from the Jews living in Israel there was also a group called the Samaritans who lived in the "central belt" in their own territory called Samaria. The Samaritans embraced a religion that was a mixture of Judaism and idolatry. Gentile Samaritans were generally considered half breeds and were universally despised by the Jews. The Samaritans only believed in the five books of Moses and rejected the prophets and the writings.

The division between Jews and Samaritans were legendary, a division Jesus did not and would not recognise.

Let us look in detail what happened:

Jesus wanted to take the quickest route to Galilee through Samaria. Jews would go around Samaria and would only enter the city to trade.

On their way they came to the town of Sychar. Just short of Sychar the road to Samaria forks. Just at the fork of the road there stands to this day a well which is known as Jacobs well.

The well itself was more than 100 feet deep. It is not a springing well of water. It is a well in which the water percolates and in which it gathers. But clearly it was a well so deep that no one could gain water from it unless they had something to draw the water.

When Jesus and his disciples came to the fork of the road Jesus sat down to rest as it was 12 noon, the warmest time of the day. Jesus was weary and thirsty. His disciples went on ahead to buy some food in the Samaritan town.

So as Jesus sat there, a Samaritan woman came to the well

It was noon the hottest part of the day and the other woman came in the cool of the day. She obviously came at a time when she could avoid other people.

Jesus asked her to give him a drink.

Can you imagine the scene?

Here was Jesus talking to a Samaritan. Jews did not associate with Samaritans and worse here He was talking to a woman. It meant that He was risking his status of being honourable. It meant that He was willing to be branded as shameful.

In that culture no Jewish Rabbi would speak with a Jewish woman without her husband present.

But Jesus ignores all the cultural barriers and asks her for water. She then responds according to her true status in society. She knew something is not right and she clearly did not want to risk her position. She states that He is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. He is not supposed to speak to her or even ask her for water. SO Jesus responded by saying: she is right. She should have asked him for water because He would have given her LIVING WATER. She then asks Him for this living water.

When Jesus says to her that she needs to bring her husband to the well, she responded truthfully by saying that she has no husband. Jesus being God then told her that she was indeed telling the truth because she already had 5 husbands and her current partner is not her husband.

As their conversation went on, she realised that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, something that He told her. Studies show that this was the only time Jesus voluntarily announced this to anyone, until His appearance before Pilot upon his arrest.

I am sure for the first time she found a man with kindness in his eyes, one who cared about her and one who was not critical or judgemental.

The Samaritan woman went back to the village and she could not keep the meeting to herself. She was excited and had to tell others.

Can you place yourself in the woman's shoes this morning?

Let us not be afraid or full of shame for Jesus is here. He already knows everything about us, even more than we know ourselves.

So what is the moral of today's reading?

- It shows us the reality of Jesus' humanity and His Divinity. Jesus was weary with the road and he sat there by the side of the well tired and exhausted. It is very significant that John who stresses the sheer deity of Jesus Christ more than any other of the gospel writers also stresses his humanity to the full.
- It shows the warmth of Jesus sympathy. From one of the orthodox church leaders of the day the Samaritan woman would have fled in embarrassment. She would have avoided such a one. If by unlikely chance such a one had spoken to her she would have met him with an ashamed and even a hostile silence.

But to Jesus it seemed the most natural thing in the world to speak to her.

She had at last met someone who was not a critic but a friend. One who did not condemn, but who understood.

It shows us Jesus as the breaker down of barriers. But Jesus had also another purpose. He wanted to get beyond mere conversation to touch her deepest emotions and lead her to face her need of redemption.

The woman at the well knew the truth about herself. She was a sinner. Jesus knew and still sought her as a follower. He knew everything about her and yet he still sought her.

This message applies to us all this morning. God is looking for you and me. He is seeking followers.

Come as you are, not trying to hide your flaws. Turn your heart towards heaven where God awaits. In doing so, your heart will be open to the appeal of His Gospel message.

- Never judge as only Jesus knows the condition of the heart.
- Never turn people away with hatred. If you have to walk away from some do it in love.
- Never think you are better than anyone else.
- Never say never.

God saved all the believers, Jews, Samaritans and even the Scots!

The Samaritan woman had met the Saviour. She got a taste from the living water.

You and I have also received the LIVING WATER through our faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Let us rekindle our commitment to follow Jesus this morning.

Let us remember that our sins are forgiven and the slate is wiped clean - the old arrest warrant cancelled and nailed to Christ cross.

I invite you to come to the Lord on this day with an open heart. At the well He once changed the life of an ordinary human being for ever through His love and compassion. He can and will do the same for you this morning if you follow Him, in and through faith.

Amen