

February 24, 2008

Insider/Outsider

Last week our sermon took us to the meeting between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus, which led to Christ's famous words, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." You would expect this dialogue to take place; after all Nicodemus was a Pharisee therefore he knew the Old Testament and the prophecies that had been spoken. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, a leader, and as a good leader he should check out any new teachings. Finally he was a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, a child of the Covenant, he was an insider. So Jesus took the time to talk with him and told him unless one is born of water, baptism and the Spirit, to be inspired, he would not be saved.

In our Gospel this morning from the very next chapter we see Jesus' ministry make a 180-degree turn. Jesus leaves Judea and heads to Galilee. Judea is in southern Israel where Jerusalem is located. Galilee is to the north it's the area around the Sea of Galilee. In between the two is Samaria, the land of the Samaritans. Samaritans were a mixed blood race, they were half-breeds. In 2 Kings 17:24 the Assyrians defeated the northern king of Israel and they took many Israelites away into captivity. These Israelites who were taken away were replaced by other defeated people who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. They worshipped their own Gods but they also worshipped the God of Israel. This of course was contrary to the first commandment, it was blasphemous and so they were labeled as outsiders they were outside the covenant. You could truly describe the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritan as a "hate/hate" relationship. Samaritans hated the Jews for their better than thou attitude and everything that came with it. The Jews hated the Samaritans for their hatred of the Jews since the Jews were right in despising them for their heritage. Such was the hatred that Samaritans wouldn't even go to Jerusalem to worship but instead they worshiped at a temple that they had built in 400 B.C. This is where Moses had commanded an altar to be built in Deuteronomy 27:4-6, by the way, Jews actually tore that temple down in 128 B.C., which only added to the hostilities and the anger between the two.

So at the time of Jesus the Samaritans worshipped without a temple and every time they worshipped they were reminded that the Jews tore their temple down. On the other hand, the Jews so despised the

Samaritans that they wouldn't even step on Samaritan soil. Instead they would travel to the east pass through Jericho cross the Jordan River and travel up the east bank until they got to the point where they were across from Galilee. Then they would cross back over the Jordan River or travel all the way around the Sea of Galilee and go into Galilee from the north. So it is interesting to see John record in 4:4, "now he (Jesus) had to go through Galilee." This wasn't the only way so he didn't have to go because of physical limitations he had to go because his mission, his ministry demanded this. This is a most unusual thing for a Jew like Jesus now add 4:6, "Jesus tired as he was from the journey sat down by the well." Jesus, a Jew, traveling through Samaria, sits down in Samaria on Samaritan soil. Heaven forbid! But wait there's more 4:7, "A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her." Hold on a second! A woman? Jesus is from a patriarchal a man-centered society, he's in Samaria, sitting in Samaria and talking to a woman a Samaritan woman. So what did Jesus say to her? "Will you give me a drink?" Now that's just out of line drinking out of a Samaritan woman's water jar? That's just not right! And the Samaritan woman gets it she says, "you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Even John the Gospel writer gets it he inserts, "For Jews did not associate with Samaritans." But just like with Nicodemus Jesus gets right to the point and he uses the image of water. He says, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." And just like the insider Nicodemus the outsider, the Samaritan woman says, "impossible." Like Nicodemus she's thinking on a physical plane not a spiritual one. But Jesus meets her at her level he says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again." He refers to the water that she is hung up on that she is thinking of but then he turns to the spiritual inviting her drawing her nearer to the truth. He continues and says, "but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Unfortunately the woman is stuck she can't see past the well, she can't see past the physical water she can't see her life of work she says, "Sir give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus totally changes his approach. He sees that she's focusing on her life and now he addresses her life very personally. He says to her, "Go call your husband and come back." "I have no husband", she responds. Jesus says to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband the fact is you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband what you have said is quite true." She senses there si

something spiritual going on here she says, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet." But she is still stuck in her life and the issues of this world, the burden the hatred she's struggling and she doesn't want to let go so she goes back to the old faithful the animosity between the Samaritan and Jew. She says, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." But notice Jesus is a great listener he takes hold of her and draws her back to the spiritual. She ends her comment dealing with worship and Jesus begins with worship he says, "Believe me woman a time is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain or in Jerusalem you Samaritans worship what you do not know we worship what we do know for salvation is from the Jews yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks." God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.

Finally the woman begins to focus on the promises of God. She exhibits a little hope she looks forward to the Messiah he'll straighten everything out he'll bring peace he'll, "explain everything to us." Jesus wastes no time he's led this woman on a journey of word and thought the journey has come to the final destination then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am He", what a profound statement. Many people say that Jesus never claimed that He was the Messiah; Jesus never claimed that He was the Son of God well right here is a pretty bold claim, he is the Messiah. The one called Christ. Did the woman believe it? Well if we fast-forward just thirteen verses we see, "many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I did so when the Samaritans came to Him they urged him to stay with them and he stayed two days. Because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'we no longer believe just because of what you said now we have heard for ourselves and we know this man really is the Savior of the world'"

Wow from outsiders from those who were hated they are now insiders they know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. From this phenomenal account this exchange between the Messiah and an outsider I think we can learn three great lessons. Number one, Christ did come for the insider, those of us here right now in the pew but He also came for the outsider those who aren't here, those who don't look like us, who don't dress like us, don't act like us, God doesn't seem them as mere mortals He sees each one as an immortal soul and as a child He wants in his home. Number two, we are to draw them just as Jesus did with this outsider. We are to draw

them to see that He is the Messiah. And number three, when we and they see Him as the Messiah our belief will be translated into action. The woman believed she went back to the town she shared they invited Jesus in He stayed with them and many more believed as a result. If one Samaritan woman, an outsider, could lead a town to salvation imagine what a whole church called Zion could do. May God give us the strength the zeal and the passion to live our faith and bring others to see Jesus as the promised Messiah.

In our Savior's name, Amen.