

The Third Sunday in Lent: A Sermon From the Rev. Pierce W. Klemmt

The Gospel : John 4:5-42

"Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with

Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and

who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her,

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water



that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."



Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

The Sermon: Third Sunday in Lent Year A

Every Sunday morning... we encounter the faith with words. We may perform deeds of glory during the week...but in church... we are *reduced* to words. Words from the Prayer Book and words from scripture...which are words of hope...words of warning...words of love. In Lent... we have words to acknowledge our mistakes...words to amend our lives. We have words for prayer... to guard and protect the ones we love ...words to voice our compassion for those beaten down and left defenseless. One thinks of the enchanting collect from Compline: "Keep watch Dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous, and all for your love's sake." Aren't those perfectly lovely words? ...A pastoral lullaby.

On Sundays... we have words over bread and wine to bless holy food...words over water in baptism to initiate the faith journey of a child's life...words to confirm young people's ascent into adulthood...words to seal our vows in marriage...words to send our saints to their eternal home. We have words glorified by music. Words of learning by Sunday School teachers transmitting the heritage of our faith to children.

These sacred words in church are spoken in a time we find it difficult to even *trust* words...printed words and spoken words. Words have become slippery. We can *hide* behind words. We can have trouble believing in another's words...even at the highest level of civil authority. It is a disturbing and probing irony that, in leadership vacuums across so many international capitals, a global pandemic has united the human family with personal and community commitments to safeguard, protect and comfort the vulnerable. Words conceal... deceive... distort. There are so many words and used so loosely... they are losing their power...power to form deep and abiding relationships...power to covenant...power to believe and unite. Even the presidential debate has turned into a fiasco of blame and shame

about the truth of each other's leadership record. Moreover, we are reduced to *processing* words. To indicate how cheap they are...we *tweet* words. Words once carried the weight of a vow. Such sacredness is disappearing.

Furthermore... we are a culture that puts little stock in words. We want *action*... not promises. We want *substance*... not words. Bible declares the faith "in word *and* deed" ...or as Eliza Doolittle says to her two suitors in *My Fair Lady*: "*Words, words, words...is that all you blighters can do? Don't talk of stars burning above; if you're in Love, SHOW me!*"

Edgar Guest...a poet laureate... put it uncomfortably closer to home when he wrote about preachers: "I'd rather *see* a sermon... than *hear* one any day..."

In Shakespeare's *King Lear* which is one of the mightiest preachments of all time... in the last act... the good and the bad... the wise and the foolish... the weak and the strong... all die alike. The stage is so littered with corpses that there is nobody much left... except Edgar... to bring down the theatre curtain. The last line in the play is disturbing and probing:

The weight of this sad time we must obey...Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

These lines are powerful because they can reignite our faith in words. We must re-learn how to use words that carry the weight of leadership and responsibility...now under the immense weight of these sad times...and bring them into alignment with the words of Jesus Christ... which is...finally... the truth of who we are... for good or ill...which is where we are headed...for good or ill ...and the healing we as a society need ...and *who* God is for us. And this is why it is important to hear the claim of the gospel... that in Jesus Christ... we can get our words back... the words we speak...to each other...on behalf of others...can be filled once again...reliably...with grace and truth.

This...in fact... is the claim of the Gospel in today's encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan women at Jacob's well...that our words can be renewed as instruments of care... commitment and healing... that our words can be transparent with the truth that is in us... made clear to the Samaritan woman... when she asked "How is it that you a Jew...asks a drink from me...because according to your tradition Jesus...I am nothing more than a despised and scorned Samaritan woman?" Jesus responds...I think with a hint of apology "Those that drink from this well will be forever thirsty. Come and drink my living water." In this unexpected *in*vention...Jesus collapsed every barrier of human bias *we* can think of. The

ancient and hard-wired prejudices in race...religion...ethnicity...sex... were obliterated by Jesus and became the tipping point for the authorities to hunt him down. This is why the truth is so dangerous. He simply talked *in truth* to her. So abused by her station in life...she was helped to hear the questions she did not have the words for asking. Jesus spoke words that gave life *back* to her... in such an overwhelming... redemptive way...she had no choice... but to *run*... with joy... to tell others.

Some years ago... a young woman who was a senior in my youth group... went away to college and eventually medical school. During her first semester... she came home on weekends... in fact she started coming home with uncomfortable regularity... which was the first clue. One Sunday night... I received a phone call from her father. He was upset. He explained how he had just put his daughter on the plane and discovered she was thinking of leaving medical school. I asked him what could possibly have precipitated such an about face decision. He confessed ignorance... but asked me to call and "talk some sense into her." So... I called Mary ... expressing shock that she decided to forfeit all her hard work... and that she may want to reconsider... before throwing it all away. "Mary, what led you to this decision?" I asked. After a short pause... she replied "Well...as a matter of fact...Father Klemmt... it was a sermon... *your* Christmas sermon on the difference between work and vocation!" She went on to say she realized she was in medical school to please others... most notably... her physician father and grandfather...but not anything that was *true* to herself. She was there to study for a career she had little interest in pursuing. She said "I can *have* a career...but what I want...is to follow is my *calling*." Then she remembered for me all her experiences growing up in the church from tutoring the children of migrant workers... serving in the soup kitchen... distributing food baskets... and how she *felt* true to herself back then... by following her own compass. So...she continued... "I'm going to figure out a way to dedicate my life to serving homeless families."

I remember... with some embarrassment how I responded to her... honestly to please her father: "Now look Mary, I was *just* preaching! Words, words, words. And then with horror... I realized what I had said. The horror of breaking my *own* word... the Church's word... the word of Christ to her. Let's just say...the truth was not in me! I prayed God to give me those words back... as if never spoken. The next thing I knew... Mary had left school... working for the United Thank Offering...distributing grants to homeless shelters.



With just a word... we can change people's lives. This is why words are important. And I find it to be law...the more dangerous words are...the more truth they convey. Jesus *spoke* to the women at the well...spoke what he *felt*...not what he ought to say. He asks her for water from the well. Cautiously...she reminds Jesus of the cultural infraction he was committing by even *speaking* to her in broad daylight...a woman...a Samaritan...no less... with serial husbands! But beneath the disgrace she divulges about her sordid life... Jesus listens and dignifies her by inviting her to partake of the *living* water he offers. He speaks to her in a wayno one ever had before. For all the eyebrow raising and finger pointing and ridicule that was around them both...for all the expectation that he should "talk some sense into this woman and rebuke her" ...Jesus refuses to condemn her for passing from man to man by a chauvinistic social system that victimized her. You want a poster child for the Me-Too Movement...you are witnessing it right here in the first century Galilee. Instead of *exposing* her... Jesus powerfully and redemptively... *names* her sub-ju-gation... and sets her free ...to live with a new acceptance of her dignity and self-worth.

"The weight of these sad times we must obey...speak what we feel, not only what we ought to say." We must obey... not just because these are sad times...sad and bewildering times for people who try to hold on to the Gospel and witness to it... when in so many ways the weight of the sadness all but crushes the life out so many. We must obey because one wonders if there is anything more important than to speak words in our time...not just what we ought to say about the Gospel...not just what it would appear in our best interest to say... but what we have ourselves *felt* about it...experienced of it...prayed over...were willing to die for... and yet we live... running to *tell* others of His grace and truth. And these...my friends... are the dangerous words we must always choose to live by.

Tags: **Worship (/worship/)**

**The Third
Sunday in Lent: A Sermon From the Rev.
Pierce W. Klemmt)**