

Sermon Archive 284

Sunday 15 March, 2020

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: John 4: 5-42 (split in two)

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Reading: John 4: 5-26

Two people are meeting - just the two of them. For her part, she's come at a time when her people aren't likely to be around. They've been in the morning, when the sun wasn't so strong. Has she come late deliberately, so she doesn't need to be among her people? Who knows! Do you know? God knows.

For his part, he's alone because his people have gone into town to find some food. That's good of them. Shame they hadn't gone out earlier for water, since now he's thirsty and tired. So, the thirsty man and the isolated woman come together at a well. Convention would have it that they wouldn't begin a conversation, because Jews and Samaritans don't usually talk. And why would they? I mean, why would I talk to you? You don't belong in my world. Your English isn't very good. You've got that thing on your head. Your skin is different. You're straight, for goodness sake! Well, you look like you are. And you - you've got your things in a shopping trolley. Your name is hard to pronounce. You have tattoos on your face. God, you look like you might support Donald Trump. There are all sorts of reasons why we shouldn't talk.

Here's the thing, though. Perhaps I am driven by this conviction that we are one - that our common Maker is longing for us to be friends - or, if not friends, then at least at peace with one another. Maybe that's the case. **Or** maybe it's nothing to do with conviction – it's just that I'm hot and needing a drink, and you have a bucket that can catch me some water. If we **do** start talking, will it be conviction or the simple fact that you have something I want? I don't know. Do you know? God knows.

Does he look around before he speaks? Because you know, if you're going to break a rule, a social norm, then it's easier to do it if no one's looking. His

people aren't back from town yet. Her people already have been and gone. The time may be right. So, he speaks to her. Can you believe it? The word that comes to mind is "astonishment". It's astonishing that he's dared to speak! "Give me a drink", he says. It's hardly friendly - more like an instruction. The beginnings are basic, not all that promising - unless all you want is a drink. Her first response is equally as primitive. She reminds him that they shouldn't be talking. He's a man. He's a Jew. He's a stranger. Is he straight or gay? Who does he vote for; why is he dressed like that? "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" She's putting into check, maybe checkmate, whatever it is that drives him. Is it a conviction that we are one, that God is calling? Or is it just that she's got something he wants? I don't know. Do you know? God knows. The first words are pretty basic.

But then, just as he did the previous chapter with Nicodemus, he brings out the ambiguous language. What is living water? How does it live? Where do we find it? Does it require a bucket? How is it to be drunk? I don't know. Do you know? God knows.

She clearly doesn't know, because it causes her to form a second question. Who are you - man at the well? Are you greater than our ancestor, Jacob? And there it is! Out of the blue, an affirmation that they have a common ancestor! Your English isn't very good. There's something strange on your head. Have you been voting for Trump? Let's not go to the orientation place! But we have a common ancestor. In some conversations that might make us family. Good God, surely not! Thank God my people aren't around to hear it - the relief of coming so late to the well. And for him - thank God his people aren't back from town yet - to be caught in the act of becoming aware that we are one - in the eyes of the God who's lurking in both our backgrounds, we are one.

He talks of how she might find the living water. He turns her to her situation at home - which being five husbanded is either really sad, or really scandalous - probably scandalous. On the balance of stuff in between the lines, it's probably scandalous, and you know we enjoy a wee scandal. Does Meghan hate Kate? Are Harry and Wills at war? Is Shane Jones watching pornography again? (Which one of those three questions was completely made up by the preacher for sermonific affect? No truth to it; does that

matter; no, we like a scandal.). Whatever, she ends up examining her domestic situation, her life - and in doing so she feels like someone else has seen, and understood - so she calls him a prophet. This conversation has got a whole lot deeper than the first basic words. Is it driven by thirst? Or is it driven by conviction. I don't know. Do you know? God knows.

Within the hands of the One who calls us to conversation, this conversation leads them to understand, together, that it's not about this mountain, or that mountain. It's not about **your** city and **my** city. It's about some future unity - fashioned not just by remembrance of our common ancestry, but by openness to what God may be wishing to build from us, out of us, the building blocks being us. We are us. Will it happen? I don't know. Do you know? God knows. And I hope so.

It is just as well, at the well, that these two human beings have spoken - that they have had time away from their respective people to fall into a conversation. Thank God for the privacy of the place. Astonishing! It may not have happened if others had been around. A time has been given. It's been guarded, guided, pardoned, provided. Will it endure when the world returns from buying food in town? I don't know. Do you know? God knows.

Another reading . . .

Reading: John 4: 27-42

The world comes crashing back into the story. No longer is it the guarded, private realm of where it's safe to talk. It's public space again - and much of the public is just astonished that the conversation's even happened. Nobody says they're astonished, but they obviously are. Sometimes you don't need to ask the offensive question, or say the obvious thing - people know anyway that you're disapproving. Interestingly enough, the first thing that happens after the astonished crowd turns up, is that the woman leaves - she gets out of their way. The conversation has been concluded. What a shame!

But not an entire shame, because now she starts talking to her **own**

people about the conversation she's had. "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done" she says. She invites others into her conversation.

Meanwhile, back in the realm of the astonished, the disciples are urging the man to eat. Maybe, if he eats, he'll get his blood sugar levels right again, and stop having these inappropriate conversations. I mean maybe God is in this, or maybe he's tired. The writer **said** he was tired. Maybe that's why he didn't go with them to get the food supplies. Jesus, are you entirely well. We don't know. Do you know? Does God know? And he's at it again, with his ambiguous language - talking about food that isn't food, and harvests - as if he's just enjoyed one. But what's being harvested? Bread or water? Minds or hearts? People? Lives? The battle cry "we are one"? They don't know. Do you know? God knows.

Whatever; many Samaritans came to be with him. They asked him to stay with them, and he did. He stayed there for two days. People staying with one another. Shall we call that new community? Shall we call it "we are one"? Did it come from thirst or conviction? I don't know. Do you know? I think God knows.

The private conversation of two hearts produced something good within the guarded, guided place. It was threatened a bit when the busy world came back, with all its cultural assumptions, and "you can't do that"s. But there was something about what the woman was saying, or the way that Jesus was being, and was continuing to speak his ambiguous word, that saved it, and drew more people in.

In our time, in the well that is our city, are we called to continue the conversation? I was about to say "I don't know"; but I think I **do**.

Do you know?

God knows; and we keep a moment of quiet.