

Behaving

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Scripture: John 4:5-42

Psalm 95

March 23, 2014

“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.”

Let us pray.

One of my daily reflection readings this week began by asking the question, “What if we were to give up division for Lent?” And then, “We could take other divisions that trouble our social and political attempts at unity: regional, gender, sexual orientation, economic, religious, and ideological. Then we can harvest them into one magnificent, writhing bundle and just let them all go. What a lesson of Lent it would be!”¹

In the Gospel Lesson this morning, we have a story where Jesus goes head on into a divisive territory. And it is a perfect example or model of an effort at letting go of human division that created a social barrier.

Last week, the scene was at night in secret, when a religious leader, Nicodemus, met with Jesus. Jesus used an earthly image of being born again to allude to spiritual transformation and believe.

This week, the scene is in the middle of the day. A woman, we are not told her name by the way, goes to the well in the middle of the day. There is no one around.

Customarily the women went to the well in the earlier during the day to avoid the hot sun.

¹ Blount, Brian “Reflections on the Lectionary.” *Christian Century* (2014): 20

There was Jesus, with no vessel in hand waiting for a Samaritan to come and give him water.

And using words that she understood, he began having a theological conversation with her. He asks her for a drink of water...and she replies, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

This woman who is considered to be the "other." Because she is:

- A woman
- Samaritan
- With a questionable past.

Her husbands have either divorced her or died. Perhaps she had to marry some of her husband's brothers, as required by religious law, or perhaps she had to remarry in order to have someone who took care of her.

Jesus is crossing the lines of divisions. To the naked eye, his actions were considered in appropriate.

Please note that Jesus does not address the issues that divided them -- he is speaking with her about something basic. He is thirsty and he asks her for water -- a water that would satisfy the deepest need of the soul.

Without much hesitation she accepts the offer and says, "Give me this water so I would never be thirsty."

But then she goes right to the heart of the matter -- she goes directly to the source of the division and she says, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. But our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people should worship is Jerusalem."

She engages him in a form of interfaith dialogue and deals directly with the deepest source of the separation between Jews and Samaritans...where they worshipped.

And so Jesus does not assert a strong position on neither side, but declares and answer that provides for a new spiritual experience.

I like the translation of these verses in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson:

“The time is coming, Jesus said, and in fact has come—when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people God is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before God in their worship.”

And so, Jesus is re-focusing the emphasis from tradition and practice to spirituality and a practice focused on worship.

Diana Butler Bass writes about Spiritual Practices and she says “Practices weave together a way of life, they shape character, create connections between people, order our choices and deepen our wisdom about living in the world.”

Here we have a most transformational story that challenges the way we should be in the world.

So I wonder, what holds us back from walking through our divisions? What holds us back from behaving radically for the price of justice?

This woman -- the fact that we do not know her name is indicative of her marginalization -- did not have much; yet, she left everything behind to go and tell others of the transformative experience she had had by the well.

What challenges prevent us to do the same? What jars would we like to leave behind? Perhaps the loss of a job...unfulfilled expectations...pain and hurts from a broken relationship?

Whatever it is, this Lenten season, let’s name them so that we can become participants of the living waters of transformation. Amen.

What impact has God have in your live that had the potential of making you leave your vessel behind and tell everyone about it?