

Sermon by Rev. David T. Young, preached at Hickory First Presbyterian, July 2 2017

**“What do you mean you’re not perfect?”**

John 4: 4-26

I want to take this opportunity to say what an honour and privilege it is for me to be here with you at First Presbyterian – I arrived on Wednesday afternoon and have quite simply been overwhelmed and greatly blessed by the warmth of welcome and hospitality shown to me from various church members:

- I’ve not had to cook a meal since I arrived – I really could get used to this!

I’m very much looking forward to our worship and fellowship together over the next 6 weeks...

You’ll no doubt be pleased to hear that on Friday evening, whilst saying Grace before a meal with the Personnel Committee, Bill Pitts prayed to God that you would all understand me – so we are off to a good start!

During discussion with Pastor Whit, we both decided to preach a 6 week sermon series - I’ve entitled my series, ‘**Sharing faith the Jesus way**’...

Sharing faith the Jesus way!

Today — and over the next 5 Sunday’s — we’re going to be considering together some well known passages from the Gospels, reflecting on the key ways in which Jesus shared his faith with those around him and how he made new disciples - new *followers* of the way!

Making new disciples - *sharing our faith with others* - is of course part of the call and commission of every single Christian:

- responding to Jesus’ command to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ is exactly why in the Christian Church - worldwide - we celebrate from time to time that great Sacrament of Baptism!

‘*Called to share our faith with those around us*’... this is a direct commission - an indictment - from Jesus Christ himself... we are to share our faith:

- **I wonder how that sits with you?**
- **I wonder how that fits in with the notion of traditional Presbyterian reserve? /**

It wouldn’t be wrong to say that some of us here will undoubtedly be more comfortable *talking* about our faith - *sharing our faith* - than others:

- and perhaps that's because we sometimes think than *in order to share our faith* we need to have the charisma and energy and magnetism of some of the great evangelists, like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham;
- and so we perhaps naturally feel too inadequate for the task; too unable to fill their shoes....

Fear not.... forget all those misconceptions you may have about evangelism, about sharing your faith...because we're not expected to fill *their* shoes:

- instead, we are called simply to **share our faith...the Jesus way**.

*And what was the Jesus way?*

*How did Jesus do it?*

He performed miracles; he healed people;

He told parables and stories; he taught...

And all of this he did based on one *guiding principle*:

- that he accepts individuals **as they are** — *with all their flaws and failings and imperfections* — **as they are** before calling for a response.

And this morning's Gospel story - *the tale of the Woman at the Well* - is a wonderful example for us of Jesus Christ accepting people as they are!

Jesus is talking with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, outside Sychar...

It's a story which in many ways is **full** of **surprises**:

The *first surprise* is that the conversation happens at all:

- the barriers to it are great;
- Jesus is a Jew and the woman is a Samaritan;
- between Samaritan and Jew there is a wall of separation no less than what in our time separates the Israeli from the Palestinian...

The Jews and Samaritans are related peoples:

- both are Hebrews;

- the Samaritans are from the old northern kingdom of Israel, while the Jews are from the old southern kingdom of Judah...

To make a long story short:

- the Samaritans inter-married with non-Jewish peoples and lost much of their ethnic identity, while the Jews maintained theirs;
- each group ended up with their own temple, the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim, the Jews on Mount Zion...

*And so it is a strange choice Jesus makes* to travel through Samaritan territory. That he strikes up a conversation with a **Samaritan** is stranger still!

There's something additional that makes this conversation beside the well a *surprise*:

- in that place and time — *in that context* — men and women are not permitted to talk to one another in public. *It's not considered proper...*

It's especially not proper when the man is, *like Jesus*, a rabbi — a teacher — someone looked up to as an example of propriety! /

There's more *still* to be said about this *surprising* encounter with Jesus and the nameless Samaritan woman:

- she clearly has been **rejected** by her own people;
- she comes to the well to draw water at *noon*, **and she comes alone...**

**Noon is the time the sun is highest in the sky. It's one of the warmest times of the day:**

- morning and evening are times to do the hard work of drawing water from the well and hauling it home;
- this is work that women would have done in company with one another;
- and unless American women are different from Scottish women, you'll agree with me when I say that when women get together - *wherever in the world they are* - they like to chat!!
- so any visit to the well is a chance for the women to chat, to have a catch up... /

But this Samaritan woman goes to the well at a time when she will be alone:

- she sees herself as a misfit, imperfect;

- she avoids others in order not to be hurt yet again by their words — *their attitudes* — their hard looks:
  - it is a **surprise** — therefore — that this conversation ever happens. But the surprises don't stop there...

It's a *surprise* that Jesus promises living water:

- living water is water that flows, *that runs*, that sparkles;
- such water would be a welcome change from water in wells or cisterns that may be flat or even stagnant... /

Jesus and the woman meet beside an ancient well that's more than 100 feet deep and seven feet wide:

- at first the woman presumes that Jesus is talking about some hidden stream he knows that is far better than this well;
- you can well imagine her wanting the equivalent of a kitchen tap, so she won't have to haul buckets any more — *and who can blame her!!...*

But what Jesus promises is a source of life in her heart, so that she can truly live:

- she is confused about what he offers, yet she understands it is something she needs, and needs desperately. //

It's also a **surprise** that Jesus knows the details of this stranger's life...

These details remain unclear to us, but it seems she's had a painful and unhappy time...

She's had five husbands:

- Did the marriages end through death, or divorce, or desertion?
- Were they truly marriages, or something else?
- Why is her current husband not truly her husband? /
- We don't have answers to these questions, and perhaps we don't need them:
- yet we absolutely recognize that this woman feels alone, and so exiles herself from her neighbours! //

The Samaritan woman is **surprised** that Jesus knows the truth about her:

- she is even more **surprised** that, **knowing the truth** — ***knowing that she is not perfect*** — knowing that she is marginal three times over — a Samaritan, *a woman*, in exile:
- **Jesus accepts her, as she is!** /

“Sir”, she says, “**I can see you are a prophet!**” //

*How good are we at accepting people as they are?*

*How ready and willing are we to follow this example from Jesus? /*

Nobody here is perfect — *I’m not perfect* — and nobody out there is perfect... *but if we can share our faith the Jesus way...* if we can leave behind our **fears** and **prejudices** and **misconceptions** and **follow the example of Christ:**

- befriending the outcast;
- putting aside custom and expectation;
- breaking down barriers rather than building them up;
- treating one another with respect and dignity;
- showing gentleness, displaying grace, being genuine... /

If we can show our trust in Christ, *on this great **adventure** with Him...*

Then, *like the woman at the well:*

- others might be ready to respond to God’s love in Christ;
- others might see how exciting this adventure is and want to join in! //

***What do you mean you’re not perfect?***

You don’t have to be... but if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus... amazing things can, will and do happen!

Something to think about...

**AMEN**