

## Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

I don't know about you, but when I think about my own childhood, I have many positive memories, but also some difficult ones too. Some how or in some way whenever I recall my early years, my joy is tempered with moments that were really tough to handle as a child.

Many times, those difficult days were not because some adult lectured me or put me down, rather the experiences that were the hardest for me to handle were when my friends would do that. It just hurt more, and if you think about it children can sometimes be very nasty to each other. I guess that is why children generally do not stand out and try to be different, all they really want to do is just fit in. That is probably why they dress the same, listen to the same music and have many of the same likes and dislikes. It's all about acceptance.

I remember that I read a story traced back in the 1950's, that there was a girl named Mary who was born with a cleft palate and grew up knowing that she was different from other kids. She absolutely hated it and had to bear the non-stop jokes and stares of cruel children making comments about her misshaped lip, crooked nose and garbled speech.

With all the teasing, Mary grew up hating the fact that she was "different" and was convinced that no one outside her family could ever love her.... until she entered Mrs. Leonard's class. Mrs. Leonard had a warm smile, a round face, and a beautiful countenance. While everyone in her class liked her, Mary came to love Mrs. Leonard.

During that period, it was common for teachers to give their children an annual hearing test. However, in Mary's case, in addition to her cleft palate, she could barely hear out of one ear. Determined not to let the other children have another "difference" to ridicule, she would cheat on the test each year. The "whisper test" was given as the children would walk to the classroom door, turn sideways, close

one ear with a finger, and listen for something that the teacher whispered. Mary turned her bad ear toward the teacher and pretended to cover her good ear. She knew that teachers would often say things like, "The sky is blue," or "What color are your shoes?" Not on that day. Seven words came out of Mrs. Leonard's mouth that changed Mary's life forever. When the "Whisper test" came, Mary heard the words, "I wish you were my little girl."

It is truly amazing the influence that we can have on other people. It is almost like growing a plant. If we give it the proper nutrients and take care of it and protect it from the environment, the plant will grow and flourish. If we ignore it, it will die. So, you can see, that our environment and we – ourselves – do have the unique power to change someone's life.

It is the same message that we receive today from Jesus Christ himself. Today, we see him interact with a woman from Samaria. It is for me the most beautiful story of God's unique love and compassion for all of us. Here was a woman who was an outcast from her society.

She, like the little girl Mary, I mentioned above, did not fit in. She had a horrible reputation in the local town and was often the center of ridicule. For these reasons, Jesus finds her at the well at the sixth hour.

Just a little bit of history here. The sixth hour was the hour in the day when the sun was the strongest. Therefore, chores would never be done during that time, never mind walking out to the well to carry back heavy pitchers of water. You would never go there during that time, unless of course you wanted to avoid seeing people. So here she is going to the well, and she comes across Jesus. We know that she is well aware of the boundaries set up by her society because she doesn't talk to Christ nor she makes eye contact with him. You see, it was also forbidden for Jews to talk to Samaritans, never mind a man to a woman!

But it was if Jesus could care less about these man-made rules. Our God, who is a compassionate and merciful God, speaks to her first, and says to her four words which would change her life, "Give

me a drink?" Now it may not seem like anything to you, but it blew her away. Not only was he talking to her, but he wanted to drink from the same cup, something that the Jews constantly avoided from the gentile world because they are not purified. She knew that this man was different, that he was a prophet, but she still could not understand him or his motives.

Christ himself, after initiating the conversation, begins to tear down the walls between them and begins to speak to her in a non-judgmental loving way. He sits with her and speaks not to her, but with her. He listens to her words and shows unconditional love and compassion. His attentiveness opens her heart, and just as a fire comes from a tiny spark, so too her insatiable desire to find out more about this Jesus grew more and more.

Finally, upon learning that he was the Messiah, she could not contain the joy and being transformed by this encounter, she forgets her anonymity and joyfully runs back into the center of the town telling the townsfolk to come and meet this amazing man at the well.

And, what is even more amazing, the people whom had ostracized her, now listen to her and go to the well to see for themselves. From being an outcast of her village, now she has become a disciple of Christ for her village. And it is perhaps because of her unique conversation with Christ, and her subsequent proclamation to the townsfolk, that these people will not be enlighten and receive salvation. In short, she saved their souls!

The transformation of this woman did not come because Christ raised someone from the dead, or because he cured some leper, or gave a blind man back his sight. This transformation began because Christ offered to this woman unconditional love. He was not concerned about what she was wearing. He did not judge her for previous sins and mistakes. Christ didn't care what other people would say about him. Rather he offered her new life, and another chance. He gave her the opportunity for repentance and salvation.

In the same way, my beloved, as we gather in this Church, our Lord does not just remain in heaven apart from all of us, rather he

sits next to us and surrounds us within his tender loving embrace. No matter the number of sins we commit, He is not a God of judgment and damnation, but rather a loving Father whom cares deeply for us His children and forgives us. Even though, many times we may go astray, Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd who calls us back and invites us to always be a part of his chosen flock.

In turn, we are also called to imitate his example. We are called to treat others, regardless of race, color, creed, gender or age with the same deep respect and compassion. Never should we consider ourselves better than anybody else, but rather we must see the image of Jesus Christ in everyone we meet. With patience, peace, and kindness we must treat others as we would the Lord. In this way, we too will be given the power to transform lives by encouraging people to reach their God-given potential.

The message that I am given you today is no different from the message Christ gave all of us two thousand years ago. It is no different than those seven words from Mrs. Leonard to Mary. It is no

different than what Martin Luther King Jr. expressed in the 60's when he told us that he "had a dream that all people could live together in peace and tranquility." That is right, the message of Christ's unconditional love and compassion for all of us is timeless. And, just like Jesus Christ himself, it is the same yesterday, today and forever. In the end, we ought to leave this beautiful Liturgy this morning knowing full well one very important reality - That no matter how we see ourselves, no matter how society views us, in Christ Jesus we will always find acceptance and in Him - we all fit in. Amen.