

Third Sunday in Lent
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
19 March 2017

John 4:5-42

There is an old adage that comes from Psychology which says that “healing comes from the telling and the re-telling of our story.” Likewise, culture, faith, values, and the identifying marks of a culture or a group are transmitted from generation to generation through stories. Stories define us, remind us who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. Stories give us a sense of place and an identity. Our collective history as a nation is wrapped up in stories about George Washington, cowboys and Indians, the Civil War, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, the 60’s, the Civil Rights Movement, Desegregation, the first Audubon Pilgrimages, Katrina, the 1000-year flood, etc.

Our own family history is always passed down from one generation to the next through stories. Stories about joys and accomplishments, loss and pain, deep family secrets, births and miscarriages, first loves, illness and recovery. Stories about the majesty and frailty of life. The same is true of this Church. We pass our stories from one congregation to the next congregation through stories about former vestries, former clergy, dances at Jackson Hall, building expansions, organ restorations, famous burials, etc. We all have a story and this story tells us who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going.

As Christians we have the greatest story ever told. We have the Biblical story which is the testament of how God has dealt with us since the beginning of the universe. This story tells us about a Creator God who chooses a nation for himself by setting aside Abraham’s family. It tells us of a liberator God who rescues his people from Egypt at their lowest time in history. It tells us of a loving God who protected his nation in the desert and guided them to a Promised Land through the ministry of Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Miriam. It tells us of Judges and Kings who protected the nation and advanced its borders. It tells us about prophets and priests, exile and restoration, and, finally, it tells us about Jesus of Nazareth and his church. Unfortunately, many no longer know these stories. We no longer tell these stories around camp fires and family gatherings. The Bible is neglected and many believe Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife, Deuteronomy is a Rock music group, Genesis tells the story of Abraham Lincoln, King David ruled England, and John the Baptist founded the Southern Baptist Church.

Today at Jacob's well we see the encounter of an old story and a new story. In terms of the Samaritan woman the story goes like this: Women are subservient to men, it is improper for them to be unaccompanied in public, it is dis-honorable for them to speak to a man in public, it is a sign of a sinful life for them to be in the market place without their husband or father after sundown, their only purpose in life is to serve their men, they are not to look at a man in the eye, and they are to mind their manners and their place. In terms of the culture where the woman lives, the story goes like this: Samaritans don't have dealings with Jews, they worship in the mountains and not in the Jerusalem temple, Jews think of them as outside God's promises to Israel, they are considered unclean and unrighteous and no better than filthy Gentiles. No one would expect or even imagine that there could ever be an interaction between this woman and Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus brings a new story into the picture, however. The story goes like this: God's eyes there is no longer male and female and this woman has the right to speak to me, to look me in the eye, and to challenge me. God has chosen to extend the promises made to Israel to people everywhere. The time has come for believers to worship God in truth and spirit, in every place and at every occasion, even when not at the Temple in Jerusalem, and even when not able to offer sacrifices. A contrite and God-directed spirit is more important than any sacrifice. Whereas in the old story the Law was the way to truth and righteousness, in the New Story Jesus is the Truth, the Way, and the Life. He is the Messiah, the Savior of the World. He came into the world that the world through him might be saved. He came to save sinners. The Samaritan is a woman with a past and Jesus accepts her as she is and offers her a future. She too can have eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. She too can have the living water God offers those who believe in him. She too can have liberation, forgiveness, restoration, and salvation. She fits within the new story through Christ. In fact she is the very person for whom Christ Jesus came into the world and for whom he died on the cross. This poor woman with little to no status, little worth in the eyes of the world, and no hope for spiritual righteousness, is elevated to the status of Child of God, accepted as she is, loved as she is, and saved as she is. All she has to do is believe.

The Samaritan woman's story is our story, as well and the story of all our ancestors who worshiped in this church reaching back to the 1800's. Jesus breaks into our own particular world every day and offers us his living water, not because we deserve this living water, but because he loves us deeply and because he seeks to have a relationship with us. Our ancestors had a past and we all have a past. No one is born at the beginning of the story. We are all born in the middle of the story. By the time we are born the story has been unfolding for centuries, and the story

will continue to unfold when we die. That is certainly the story of this place. It has stood as a testament of God's love since 1827.

Like our ancestors, we all have deeply rooted secrets. Our failures tend to determine many of our relationships as they tended to determine their relationships. We often let our failures determine who we are. We often feel defeated and as lost as the Israelites in the desert. The good news of Christ's Gospel, is that, even though we are all "people with a past" through Jesus of Nazareth and his great love and compassion for us, we now have a future. In him, through him and by him we have a future. The new story is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save Samaritans, and we are all Samaritans.

I invite all of you during this season of Lent to reach out and accept his love and his forgiveness. You are the beloved and you belong to the new story. Amen!