

Scripture Readings and Sermon

March 15, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Romans 5:1–11 *(NO Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))*

In Chapter 4, Paul makes an extensive argument that Abraham is not made righteous because of his obedience to the Law but was made righteous by his faith in God. It is that same leap of faith in the resurrection of Jesus that reconciles the believer. Faith is not a work but is a response to the work that has already been done. Humanity could reconcile their relationship with God but "while were still weak" God sent the "anointed one" (Christ) as a means of reconciliation. This was not done through an animal sacrifice but rather for the free will act of love on the cross. By accepting this act of love by faith, we are justified. Justification by faith brings righteousness with God and peace through Jesus Christ. From this relationship flows grace which imparts hope to the faithful even during tribulation. When faced with tribulation, the faithful can either lose their faith or persevere in their trust. If they persevere, they will find that God has given them sufficient grace to stand strong which strengthens their righteous character. Like a callous that grows harder and stronger with every use, the person whose character finds their hope in God only grows in hope with each tribulation for God does not disappoint. The more a believer relies on faith, the more the Holy Spirit supports and encourages the believer.

Commentary on John 4:5–29, 39–42 *(NO Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))*

There are three basic roads from Jerusalem to Galilee: coastal, Jordan, and the high road through Samaria. The dislike between Samaria and the Jews is rooted in the original split of the Davidic Kingdom between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. A deep rivalry set in between these two nations and often they would join with the enemy of the other. After Israel fell, the people who were left began to intermarry with those outside "the faith" and were considered unclean by their southern Jewish (from Judah) neighbors. It is in this context that the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan women needs to be understood. John gives us one more hint about this encounter when he says that it was "about noon" when the woman came to the well. Most women came in the cool of the morning. Only those who were shunned by the community came at a later time when they didn't have to face the gossip of the other women. This background sets the stage for the discussion.

When Jesus asks for a drink, the woman automatically responds in the context of the bitter dislike between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus' response, however, ignores the petty differences and points to the greater reality of God and his own life as living water. Like Nicodemus, she focuses on the practicality of getting water in a dry region. Jesus responds by talking about the spiritual water of life. Unlike Nicodemus, she does not continue to question but rather asks for this water. Jesus then begins to test her intentions by asking about her husband. The reason she is shunned by others becomes clear with her response. After her truthful response, she then asks Jesus about the nature of worship. Jesus' response leads her to proclaim that she is waiting for the Messiah that will bring true worship. Her response to Jesus' proclamation was to immediately tell others the "good news" (gospel) the Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). While the disciples merely brought Jesus food, she brought her entire town to the saving knowledge of Jesus.

Sermon "Faith" *([Sermon Video](#))*

"God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:6)

"Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord." (1 Peter 3:14-15)

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18)

"Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.'" (Mark 5:36)

The encounter of the woman at the well should be viewed in contrast to the previous encounter with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus, a leader of the people and a rich man, came to Jesus in the middle of the night where as Jesus encounters the poor and shunned woman at the well in the middle of the day. Nicodemus came in fear and left with doubts. The woman began with doubts but left with faith. During this time of fear and irrational thinking, it is important to ask if we are more like Nicodemus or the woman at the well?

I described the woman at the well as poor and shunned based on what scholars have gleaned from her being at the well at noon. Given the heat of the day, most women would have been at the well early but she was by herself at noon. It may have something to do with the number of husbands she had and the power of gossip to drive people from groups. Either way, we know that unlike Nicodemus, the woman had nothing to lose in talking with Jesus.

This is the first step toward walking away from fear. When we surrender our life to Christ, what else do we have to lose? Faith is trusting that the one who loves you also has your back. Through faith in Christ, we find the Spirit's assurance that we are not alone. Every time we seek help from Christ in the midst of suffering, we find that our faith is fulfilled in the presence of God who helps us endure. That endurance produces a deeper character of faith which gives us hope for the future. Faith becomes a spring of water in the midst of the desserts of fear and doubts.

When Jesus offered the woman the spring of life, unlike Nicodemus she no longer questioned but from the heart asked for this water. When we give our heart by faith to God, we then truly worship in spirit. Jesus' response was to test if her heart was true. By admitting her deepest pain and shame, she became vulnerable and open to Jesus. The second step away from fear is to be truthful about what is behind the fear. By naming the fear, we can more easily give that fear to God. This is what it means to worship in truth.

Through an honest and faithful heart open to God, we can by grace receive the Spirit of love, power, and self-discipline. Self-discipline means that God has given us a brain and common sense. Having faith is not the same as being ignorant or careless. The Spirit gives us wisdom to take care of ourselves and one another. By having faith in God, we trust that the advice of the Spirit will guide us through the dangers of life. In prayer, the true worship of truth and spirit can be expressed and in prayer the word of God can be heard if we listen.

As we find that God is faithful and merciful through the many trials of life, we can join with the Samaritans and say that, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." Salvation is not found in fear and darkness but in faith and the light. Have faith and walk humbly with God.

Taught on March 4, 2020

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