

This Love is Real©**Eph 2:4-7, John 4:1-42****February 22, 2015****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

Today marks the first Sunday in the Lenten journey. This year our focus theme is titled: *This Love Changes Everything*. We will be reflecting and looking to see how Jesus' own journey – his journey to the cross, made because of his love for us – has made a difference in our lives.

This month, we are not only looking at the Scriptures to see how Jesus' life changed everything for those he met, but how he has changed the lives of people today.

Last Sunday we had the great privilege of hearing two of our own members of this family of faith tell us about their lives – their journey of faith – and how Jesus and the Body of Christ changed so much for them.

I want to invite you to all be thinking about your faith story. On Maundy Thursday, instead of having a Seder Meal, which is the kind of meal and celebration the Jewish people do at Passover, where they repeat the story of the past and how God led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, we will have an opportunity to tell our own stories of how Jesus has led us through the ups and downs of our present-day lives.

We will have a chance to say where we have seen God at work in the lives of his children – us – through our own faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Your story may be very simple, very brief. It may be one little story out of many in a lifetime of faithful living. Or, it might be about a complete turn around in your life. There isn't one way that is right, and one that is wrong. Everyone who is a Christian has a story of faith and they are all good.

Of course, no one will be put on the spot. If you aren't comfortable sharing a story, I hope you won't let that keep you from coming and hearing the others.

There is power in telling, and power in listening. We will celebrate our faith in Jesus, whose love changes everything.

And so, we begin again.

Today we begin at a well in a town named Sychar in the country of Samaria – a country long hated by the Jews because of a very, very old dispute over worship and where it should be ... not to mention the fact that the Samaritans were considered to be half-Jews.

At one time, long before this, when the Jews were taken captive, some of them married Gentiles – their captors.

A Jew would walk a long ways just to go around Samaria and not have to associate with a Samaritan.

But, we aren't surprised, are we, to find Jesus taking his disciples right straight into the land of Samaria. I'll bet Jesus was just hoping for an encounter, don't you?

We're told that Jesus was tired so he stayed at the well while his disciples went off to find some lunch. It was straight up noon; hot; sunny (probably) and not the usual time when the women would come to draw water from this old well that they claimed was a well that Jacob (the grandson of Abraham) had dug. The Samaritans were very proud of that fact!

The normal time to draw water in that hot desert land would have been early in the morning or late in the evening. But, lo and behold, here comes a woman with her bucket, ready to draw water – at the hottest time of the day!

Surely she saw Jesus and knew he was a Jew. I'm not sure how she knew it but John says she did. Of course, she wouldn't speak to him or acknowledge him. She was a woman and a Samaritan. Two strikes against her!

But Jesus, being Jesus, spoke to her saying: 'Give me a drink'. ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'

¹⁰Jesus 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.'

¹¹The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?'

¹³Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

¹⁵The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

At this point in the story, the woman can only hear the literal invitation from Jesus. But how could she possibly know what he really meant? Surely, she was thinking, "this man is delusional. There is no such water that will make me never be thirsty.

But then Jesus suddenly tells her to go call her husband to come back with her. And she answers that she doesn't have a husband ... which is the truth. But it's also just a half-truth. And Jesus saw right through it.

"You're right," he said. "The person you are living with now is not your husband. But you have had five husbands."

Woops. There's a third strike against her!

Now we might be able to guess why this woman is coming to the well at noon, instead of coming along with the other village women when it's earlier and cooler. She is probably not just looked down on by Jews, but also by her own people.

We aren't told why she had had five different husbands. Maybe they had all died. But a woman who had been married so many times and especially a woman who was living with a man and not married would be considered a person with a bad reputation.

Which makes it all the more interesting that Jesus, who sees all these things, still gives her his attention with this deep conversation.

The woman is stunned by Jesus' knowledge of her. "Sir, I see you are a prophet!" she said. Yet she keeps talking. If this man is a prophet, perhaps he can shine some light on the confusion about worship. So, they talk about true worship and where it should take place – the age old argument between Jews and Samaritans.

²¹Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

²⁵The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Now, can't you just see Jesus looking deep into her eyes with a loving smile as he said:

'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

And then, just as the disciples were arriving and astonished that Jesus was talking with this Samaritan woman, she left her water-jar and went back to the city.

She said to the people, ²⁹'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'

Suddenly, what this woman saw in Jesus was more than what she first saw. Yes, he was a man, and he was a Jew. And then she discovered he was also a prophet. That, in itself, was amazing ... that a Jewish man would give her the time of day. And especially that a prophet would actually talk to her about such important things like worship and the Spirit.

But, there was something in those words spoken after she confessed that she knew the Messiah was coming – something dawned on her – like an epiphany – when Jesus said the words “I Am.” I am he. I am the Messiah who has come to proclaim all those things you have been talking about and waiting for.

Suddenly, who He was became real to her. And she runs to tell others – all those who had perhaps snubbed their noses at her. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”

And while we aren't told that she said it, her wonder and joy implies that she was also saying “And he loves me anyway!”

This love is real. Her testimony in the village drew people to Jesus and we are told he stayed with them for several days. And you know his love became real to them – to these who were all considered outcasts by their own – Jews all of them.

We can be sure that because of Jesus' love their lives were changed.

This love changes *everything*.

Jesus said, “I AM he.” I am the one you are looking for. I am the one who will show you the Father. I am the bread of life. I am the living water.

And we are brought back to Moses, at the burning bush, who asked God when he was told to go save the Israelites from slavery in Egypt: “who shall I say has sent me?” (Exodus 3).

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. ”He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This is the first time in many to come where John tells us Jesus uses those ancient words – that name for God. I AM.

We all have a story, just like the woman at the well. I know I have a story. I stand here on the path of my own Lenten Journey looking back at my life and I know that Jesus'

love changed my life. 40 years ago I would have never dreamed that I would be here today in a pulpit, preaching, serving in the best little congregation in the whole world – at least the best for me.

I remember the times in my life when I was thirsty – a thirst I could not quench. And some days I still feel that way. As we begin this Lenten Journey, I think most of us come thirsty. We come with a bucket or a cup or something, hoping to fill it with some thing that will satisfy us.

But Lent is about realizing that there really isn't anything we have that will fill our cup. It is about letting go. It is about offering our cup to Jesus' – who is the only one who can fill us up with living water –that will be like a spring gushing up to eternal life!

Like the woman at the well, may you know first hand that this love is real and that it is a love that changes everything. May we all be about discovering – through this journey in Lent – how our lives have changed, and been enriched, because of Jesus Christ.

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