

The Rock: 06-14-2020**The Church**

First reading: John 4:27-35

Title: The Ekklesia

Scripture: John 4:1-26

Theme:

What, or better yet, who is the church? Church is not a building. We are the church, the people of God centered in and circled around a person, and that person is Jesus.

Introduction:

I challenged us just over a week ago as a church to pray for our country, our leaders and the church. With so much discord and anger, we are to look to be part of the solution, rather than adding to the problem.

Learning that loving God, loving people, and telling them why at times can be very hard. Some people are simply hard to love.

G.K. Chesterton once said: "It is no wonder God calls us to love our

neighbors, and to pray for our enemies. Because more often than not, they are one and the same.

There are many places to go in the Scriptures when it comes to understanding the Church and who she is.

John 4 is typically not one of them. But this is where I was led. So here we are.

The church is not a place, it is a people. And if we were all gathered here today and looked at one another, and then were honest with ourselves, we would discover a simple fact:

If it were up to me, this is probably not the people group I would put together. That is not being mean or cruel, just realistic.

So, it's a good it's not up to us. Because this is the group of people God has chosen to assemble here in St. Albans VT to fulfill His purposes.

The Story:

God always surprises us with who He picks. Consider our first reading, when the disciples think, but don't ask what is quite a rude question:

"Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

-John 4:27 ESV

I am sure there are times that we think much the same way and the same things. Actually, today, we just seem to say it out loud with little care.

I find this story a fascinating one. Because the majority of this conversation happened while the disciples were down at the local sandwich shop looking for food.

So, at some point later in time, Jesus had to fill in the gaps around just what was said to this Samaritan woman with quite a shady past.

That is why I love this story, and this encounter. It gives hope to all who have shady and questionable pasts. It gives hope to the outcast, the downtrodden, those without a voice.

Part of **being** the Church, a much more difficult concept than **going** to church, is to step into someone else's story, to walk with them in their shoes, to

empathize, to understand -or at least make the attempt to.

It is about making oneself vulnerable for the sake of the other, putting oneself in need, and in doing so, recognizing the deep value of the other. **For every human being has value.**

Jesus did exactly that when he came upon this woman gathering water:

"Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)"

-John 4:1-8 ESV

Again, as we read this, most of us see nothing wrong or strange with it. Ancient middle eastern cultures gathered water at wells, and usually it was a woman who did it.

No big deal. But it really is. Jesus has chosen to go through a country, Samaria, that the Jewish people would avoid at all cost. Adding miles to their trip in order to avoid walking through that land.

Samaritans were dirty people, half-breeds a left-over remnant from the fallen kingdom of Israel and pagan people who intermarried with them.

Harsh? Yes, but true. Jesus should not have been there, but he was. Why? He chose to be. That **ethnic barrier** has long been a problem for Jewish people. Refusing to associate with those whom they considered dirty and ungodly, really hindered the sharing of God's love.

Jesus cares very little for that concept, as God is gathering together a people from every tribe, nation and language to make ONE people of God.

If Jesus cared about our politics, our perspectives, and our desires to build

a group of global worshippers, he would have asked, and we would have responded in ways that, well, would have kept us out of places like Samaria.

So much for that ethnic issue. That barrier is torn down. So we ought not to be rebuilding it. Not if we understand just who the Ekklesia (The Church) is.

Jesus tackles the **gender barrier**, as he has no issue meeting with a woman, and one of questionable character in the middle of the day, alone.

Something we would never think to do. But that drives me to ask the question: "Why do we think she is the one with a questionable character?"

What about the men in her life? We presuppose a lot of things here, especially us men. Let's look at what we have:

"Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

-John 4:16-18 ESV

What we know is that she has had five husbands, and is living with a guy. OK. Yet, our minds go right to the thought she must be the problem.

Why? Because we are inclined to think that way. But what if for a moment we think instead, along these lines by Ravi Zacharias:

"Jesus was talking to a socially ostracized and desperate woman whose life had been used and abused till she had no sense of self-worth left."

-Jesus among other Gods -Pg. 85

What does this have to do with "The Church"? I'm getting there. Because walls are being torn down here, dividing walls of hostility, in order that God's people, His church comes into existence.

This is not a new story at all. In fact, this is what God's people were supposed to be doing all along, and sharing with all the nations as they held out the hope found in God.

"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a

covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

-Isaiah 42:6-7 ESV

Love God-Love People-Tell them why

Don't over complicate it. But we do, all the time.

Every one of us, when confronted with ourselves, do all we can to run circles around the truth that is found there. We look for any excuse not to look into the mirror, and say:

"I am part of the problem, I need to choose to confront my way of thinking, being and doing." We don't though. Not typically. Instead we hope that the matter, the issue, the sin dies the death of a thousand qualifications.

And in some sense, that is what this woman is doing. At every turn, being challenged by Jesus, at a well, in the middle of the day, having church, when he questions her, she questions back.

Asking rabbit hole questions, secondary ones that really distract from the prime reason why Jesus is there -to

capture her heart and bring a lost child home to the Father:

"The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

-John 4:11-12 ESV

Tell me, you Jews think you're all that and you treat us as less than human. You think you are better than our father who dug this well? The **culture barrier**.

No, it's not about your culture or your heritage, as if one is better than another. It's about who you know.

"Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

-John 4:13-14 ESV

I don't think it a stretch to ask this Question:

Do you think this conversation would have ever happened at the temple in Jerusalem?

Of course not. Why? She would never have gone there, and they would never had welcomed her.

Church isn't a place, it's a people. And what a rough bunch of people it seems to be.

It's not actually about your history, it's about your future. But, bring your culture, your uniqueness with you. Don't change who God has made you to be, but allow your heart and mind to be conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Jesus, in opening up the ethnic divide, ignoring the gender concern, and refocusing the cultural barriers, opens the way for the most important stuff.

The **Spiritual barrier**. The truth that humanity is at odds with God, their creator. Because of that we are at odds with ourselves AND one another.

That can only be fixed in Christ, and by Him entering into our lives, and hearing our story and redeeming us from sin and ourselves.

Jesus took the time at a well, to listen, to purposefully avoid rabbit hole questions, and VALIDATE a person.

Never the circumstance, but the person. They have the ability to converse, to have dialogue over a bunch of differences. All of which divide, yet in the end, unite.

Who we worship, how we worship and where we worship, are all dealt with here:

"The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

-John 4:19-24 ESV

Church happens anywhere. If we but pay attention to what is happening. Circled around Jesus, focused upward and outward, we find that "The Church -the People of God", stay on task.

He makes very clear something that we need to take to heart. Salvation is from the Jews. That is a foundational truth:

"...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

-2 Corinthians 5:19 ESV

The prime mission of the Church is to declare this truth. This entire conversation has been leading to this very moment.

Let's tear down the dividing walls of hostility, let's take away the notion of ethnic superiority, of gender inequality, of cultural constrains, and realize that **In Christ**, we are one body.

What does she say to Jesus? There are no more arguments, no more attempts,

but a realization that when "THAT PERSON" comes, he will clear it all up.

"The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

-John 4:25 ESV

You're looking at him right now ma'am:

"Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

-John 4:25 ESV

The Ekkesia -The people of God-centered in and around a person, not a building.

So, in every sense you do not "go to church". I understand, we know this, but do we really?

You are the church. You bring church with you wherever you go. We do not invite the Holy Spirit to come and join us on a Sunday morning gathering.

He is already present, in his people, as each one of you walk through the door. Our duty is to be focused properly and seek what it is He is doing and wants to do as we gather

together on Sunday in a unique and special way.

But God is not confined to a building. Getting stressed out as though God cannot function because we are not here, misses the point.

We are to gather, and I want us all to do so. But the Church is not silenced because we are not in the building.

We are to engage God in song, encounter Him in the word, and respond to Him in prayer. That ought to be happening every day, where you are, and then in obedience to His call, once per week as His gathered body in one place.

Right now, that one place looks different, but we are still the Church.

Church happened at the well because there was an engagement, and encounter which changed a life, and then a response which led to what I would call a revival, or an awakening in the town of Sychar.

I leave that with you to read perhaps as a family this evening or sometime this week. The rest of chapter four is a beautiful story of redemption not just of this woman, but of a people.

I leave you with this, another quote from Ravi Zacharias. Forgive me, but since his death, I have been back into his books as much as my commentaries.

These are his words regarding this encounter:

"It was Christ Himself, the Bread of Life and the spring of living water...The transaction was fascinating. She had come with a bucket. He sent her back with a spring of living water. She had come as a reject. He sent her back being accepted by God Himself. She came wounded. He sent her back whole. She came laden with questions. He sent her back as a source for answers. She came living a life of quiet desperation. She ran back overflowing with hope."

-Jesus among other Gods -Pg. 85

The Church is The People of God on mission in His world, seeking to reach the last, the lost, and the least.

Loving God-Loving People-telling them why.

Whenever it is possible, we gather in this beautiful place as His people, to be discipled, to be encouraged, and to

pray. Not so we can say: "I went to Church today."

But rather, to be reminded that I am the Church wherever I go, and in whatever I do. Bringing Glory to God, and looking for that one lost and wandering sheep.