



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Eternal Instant” **Sermon on John 4:5-11**

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John 4:5-11

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus 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.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”

“For God so Loved the World, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Saved from what? Some would say, “Saved from Hell.” Well, what’s hell? Where’s Hell? Is it a place down there? How far do you need to dig to get to Hell?

Some argue that Hell is less of a place and more of an experience. Hell is to be defined as the absence of God.

Or, as I like to describe it, a trip to the license bureau. An experience I had a few weeks ago because my old license decided that it would rather remain at the Denver Airport than fly back home with me.

And thus, I was led to the basement of the William Snodgrass Tennessee Tower, or as I like to call it, “the valley of the shadow of death.” Time slows there. One can get in touch with the eternal there. The experience was heightened because that morning, I decided to put both contacts in my eyes. I know what you’re thinking, “Don’t people normally put two contacts in their eyes?” Yes, normal people do. But, like today, I only have one in. Because if I have a

contact in both eyes I can hardly read a thing. So, I read with this eye and see distance with the other.

Anyway, at the license bureau, I remembered I had both in at the moment when they pointed me to go to a computer screen to enter my information. I'm trying to read the instructions and what to enter. And if you get one little thing wrong, like misspelling your name, it makes you correct it before you can move forward. Finally, I gave up and pulled a contact from one of my eyes. And stuck it in my mouth, because I'm cheap and thought that maybe I could salvage it later by keeping it warm and moist. Now that I could see, I finished with the screen and was given number 603 about the time I heard 459 being called; I found a chair in Hell.

The question most asked in Hell is, "What are you in here for?" I know, it's the same question they ask in prison. Another question is, "Just how long have you been in here?" The same questions they ask in prison.

And while all that felt like Hell, it wasn't really Hell.

Hell, I think, is a place where a young man was. I heard about his story this week from a father. A father the son of a neighbor. The father told of a son who fought and fought and fought depression. "As a child, he was a happy child. Fun loving. He was a very intelligent young man, very sharp. He would explore the complexities on complexities of how life is all knitted and knotted together, and he'd get twisted up in it all and life closed in very darkly.

The father said, "I would call my son every night." They would have phone conversations that would last two or three hours a day. And his dad said, "I just listened while he would talk about the intricacies of some subject that he was exploring." It was interesting, but I hardly spoke. It wasn't a phone line. It was a lifeline. Just trying to keep him going another day. One day he called, and no one picked up.

And so, you see, this is the strange world that God so loved and is determined to save. Save us from what? Maybe ourselves.

For what is hell? Hell for some is sitting in church. Hell for others is set aside for those who don't sit in church. There are some in the church that say Hell is for those who commit mortal sins, and they have a list. Hell for another is an afternoon at the license bureau digesting a contact lens. Only to learn that Hell for another is a darkness that will not let go.

God sent his son to save the world. Did you hear how Jesus saves the world? John writes, "He had to go through Samaria." He had to.... Do you suppose he had to because some thought Samaria was a God-forsaken place? A Hell? Salvation doesn't come to Samaritans. Samaritans are not God's people because Samaritans are not like us. "For God so loved 'some' of the world.... And we have a list, and Samaria isn't on it. He had to go through, Samaria.

Did you hear how Jesus saves the world? At the brightest point of the day, high noon! The light shines the most brightly. The heat turns up. The son of God speaks to a Samaritan woman and the time changes! We go from Chronos to Kairos.

His disciples, who are in the old time zone, will see whom Jesus is talking to and John writes, "They were astonished that he was speaking to a woman." Astonished because you don't do that. Because some men at some point in time had the power to draw a line that separates the holy from the profane. And when you're on the right side of the line, it isn't meant to be crossed.

Did you hear how Jesus saves the world? He had to go to Samaria. He had to speak to a woman as well. But she knows there is a line someone drew, and Jesus crossed it. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, woman of Samaria?" But he crossed it as if it wasn't there. As if it wasn't there.

And Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' he would have given you living water." Salvation is so close and so easy you can taste it.

But, as it is, it's not that easy. We make it harder. We draw lines and build walls that separate Jew and Samaritan.

We say you can only worship on the mountain in Jerusalem. No, you can only worship on the mountain in Samaria. We draw lines - she and he, her and him - as if we are defined by our sex. We draw lines - the woman at the well had five husbands and the one she is living with now isn't her husband. We draw lines between what is pure and impure. Every line he crossed as if it wasn't there.

"If you knew the gift of God, and the one who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' he would have given you living water. So close you can taste it."

And she says, "Sir, you have no bucket. And the well is deep." She's drawn a line. She sees the reality of the situation. Imagine telling God, the one through whom all things are possible, "God, you just don't see the reality of the situation. You have no bucket, and the well is deep." She's not the first.

TJ read to you about the people in the wilderness who were thirsty and complained. These are people who were in Egypt, but miraculously escaped. Through God, all things are possible. These were people who were led by a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire at night. These were people who saw the Red Sea split in two. Celebrated the defeat of their enemy.

But, when they got thirsty as Hell, they asked, "Why did you bring us out here to die?" What they were saying to a God through whom all things are possible was, "You have no bucket, and the well is deep."

And Moses hits a rock with a stick. Done! A sentence or two later, they're hungry. "Why did you bring us out here to die? We're as hungry as Hell." Moses lifts up a prayer. And food comes out of the sky. Manna? And then had quails drop from the sky. You would think they'd get it, but the most repeated line in Hell is, "You have no bucket, and the well is too deep." Hell is the absence of God.

"Lord, I know you say reconcile with my brother and sister. But do you know what she did to me? Do you know how painful my wounds are? It won't work, Lord, I know it won't. Because I know you have no bucket, and the water is deep."

"Lord, you tell me to speak the gospel. You tell me to speak truth to power. But, if do, I'll lose my friends. I won't be popular. I know this, because you have no bucket, and the water is deep."

"Lord, I know, I put myself before everyone else. But, if I don't look after myself, who will? Who's got my back? Do you? Look at you. You have no bucket, and the water is deep."

And we wonder why there's no one coming to church.

In the belly of the Snodgrass building, a woman sat a seat away from me. She came in with her young son who took up the seat next to me. And she sat down with a “Whoof,” and a “Lord, have mercy.” Someone said, “What are you in here for?” She replied, “I had to get out of my apartment because they’re going to tear them all down. And I moved in with a friend, so I can save enough money to put down a down payment on a new place. Had to pick up my son early from school because I wouldn’t be home when he got home. And she laughed and shook her head, “Oh honey, you have to laugh to keep from crying.”

And the longer that woman was in the room, the more her light shined. She would hum a hymn under her breath. She helped people come into the room. Welcomed them right in. Had people laughing. “Lord, Jesus. Here and there.”

Now, I could have said, “from the story you shared about your day, your life, “You have no bucket, and the water is deep.” I could have said that. But I didn’t. Because I had no power! In that thin space, her life was found not in all that was wrong, but in what was right. And if I had the power to cross invisible lines, I might have asked, “Can I have what you’re drinking?”

And then there was the father who tried to save a son, but failed. I could have said, “Well you had no bucket, and the water was too deep. But I didn’t. For in the thin space between living water trickling down his face and that deep well of love, the father said, “At least he is at peace.” So much love poured out for salvation.

And so, know this. Know that Jesus just had to go to Samaria. Know that Jesus had to talk to a woman who had five husbands. Know that Jesus had to say “It doesn’t matter anymore what mountains you’re worshipping on. Know that Jesus says it doesn’t matter anymore where you’re from. Know It doesn’t matter anymore what sex you are. The lines drawn by fearful men are invisible to a God who loves this world.