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John 4:5-42

Today's Samaritan Woman

By Edgar F. Solís

Illustration.

“When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.” These are the words of Harriet Tubman, who among other things served the Union Army as a spy, helping map out areas of South Carolina and who became the only woman to lead men into battle during the Civil War. Harriett was not satisfied with just her own freedom. While under fire, her group freed more than 700 slaves from neighboring plantations. Before and after her work as a spy she also served as a nurse and cook for the Army. Despite her service to the Union, Tubman never received a regular salary and was denied an official military pension.

The new awakening in the feminist movement.

Something is happening in the world today. Women in different countries are defying the old structures of oppression. More and more they are demanding human rights and better opportunities. Many of them in different places are fighting. They are raising their voices and hands and they are speaking with Jesus asking hard and interesting questions. When we take a careful look at today's Gospel story we can learn what is God thinking in regards to human prejudice, cultural/religious divisions and incorrect assumptions about other human beings. More importantly we see how Jesus models love and compassion for everyone.

Bible context. We can find relevant information in different Bible commentaries.

In Jesus' day, Samaritans were the descendants of generations of intermarriage between Jews left behind during the Babylonian exile and the conquering gentile Assyrians who had settled in Israel. Thus Samaritans shared a common heritage with Jews but also were quite different.

“Samaritan” was a kind of shorthand for both “apostate” and “adversary.”

What I consider most striking about the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is that they break two taboos at once: one against a religious teacher speaking with a woman in public, and the other against Jews and Samaritans interacting on such intimate terms (asking to share water, for example). The conversation itself implicitly exemplifies this barrier-breaking and bridge-building, but it also makes explicit the reconciliation at the heart of the Gospel.

However, let's pay attention as the woman challenges Jesus to clarify an ancient dispute. “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20; the Greek word for “you” here is plural, as in, “you Jews”. Wow!

Look at this woman!). Jesus proclaims that “the hour is coming” when this religious divide will be overcome and both Jews and Samaritans will worship God “in spirit and truth”. Jesus points toward a new epoch in which holiness will overflow conventional bounds, reconciling ancient enemies.

Theological Reflection.

What I see here is the Samaritan woman raising her voice. She is demanding from Jesus not only an explanation, she is demanding righteousness. She wants to be visible and to count. In this interaction, Jesus is calling us to move beyond narrow-minded ideas and to adopt a wider, deeper form of trust in God and then through our testimony and actions, transform the reality expressing the kingdom of God here on earth today. In Jesus we are called to live in a way that dismantles

divisive hierarchies, like the patriarchal societies created between men and women. We must live in a way that bridges religious and ethnic sectarian divides, like the one between Jews and Samaritans. In two words, the Way of Jesus comes down to this: *reconciliation and transformation!* Both words represent a crucial decision on our part; to see everything and everyone through the eyes of Jesus, however, many times this is challenging.

Forgive me!

Understanding my cultural and theological background, being conscious of my actions, my words and my thinking about women, I want to ask forgiveness. I have to say I consider that I am no longer that same person however ashes of past thinking remain in my memory... I ask forgiveness for the past prejudices, for my words, thinking and actions... for my believing in an only male, patriarchal God. I ask forgiveness for the arrogance and violence of my conscious and unconscious thinking. Forgiveness for the indifference and the superficial thinking about the enormous burdens that many of you women carry. I ask forgiveness from my mom, my daughter and my wife whom I love. I promise to continue to grow to be more like Jesus because I have found transformation through Him.

In the story of the Samaritan woman we come to understand that God seeks us, God longs for us and God has provided living water through Jesus so we can be transformed and worship God in spirit and in truth!

Takeaways:

For John, Jesus' arrival signals the dawn of a new era, a new intimacy with God, a new conception of "the temple" not as a building but as a person "in spirit and truth", Jesus himself, God's Word made flesh. The old sacrificial system must end; there's no need for animals and money changers, and no need for competing sacred sites either. In fact, the old system only

stands as an impediment to the dawning new day. And “the old system,” as it turns out is made of more than brick and mortar and money and sacrifice. It’s also made of social barriers between men and women, Jews and Samaritans, friends and enemies, insiders and outsiders, “us” and “them.” But Jesus heralds a new era of reconciliation: *Take down the barriers! Bridge the divides! For the hour is coming - and is now here! (John 4:23)*. A woman’s question started all of this...amazing! Woman! Raise your voice, move and fight for what is right and good, ask questions, embarrass us with your boldness and enthusiasm! Take the places that according to the oppressive systems belong to the men!

Like Harriet Tubman, who experienced liberation and freedom from slavery, we all need to cross the line of slavery of sin and death and prejudice in order to be free. Remember what she said; “When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.” We all can experience heaven here on earth when we are able to set our souls free from division, bigotry, exclusionary thinking and prejudice. Let’s all move forward and listen to today’s Samaritan woman. Let’s model Jesus and worship God in Spirit and in truth! Amen!