

Building the Bridge Between Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman

Last Sunday, under the cover of darkness, a religious leader, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, secretly came to Jesus to ask him some questions about his identity and God.

In perhaps the most famous responses ever, Jesus said in John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world..."

In Jesus' day, the world was much smaller, limited to a day's walk, and filled with people who looked and believed like they did, well, save for the hated Romans who occupied their country.

So Nicodemus may have heard these words with a narrow understanding of the world then we do today.

But Jesus doesn't just say these words, he shows the disciples the larger world that God so loves. In following Jesus, they find themselves going out into the larger world beyond the borders that has defined their cultural and religious identity.

The first stop is Samaria. Now we might think of Samaria as home to the "Good" Samaritan. But for the disciples who were Jewish, like Jesus, Samaritans were anything but "good." They had a bad reputation. They were enemies, hated and despised by Jews.

Actually, it was a family blood feud of sorts. Samaritans were related. Samaria was located in the central, mountainous area of Palestine. The city of Samaria had been the capital of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel. Following the bardic attacks of the Assyrian Empire on the Israelites, when the Second Exile period ended, and people returned, some Jewish people mixed and mingled with Assyrians who had remained in that region. While they were "Jewish", they did not worship God in the exact same way. They had literally fought with each other, spilling blood. Jewish people hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated the Jewish people.

It is hard for us to relate to this today - right, we love everyone or do we? Hate is a strong word, and as people of faith, we are called to love the world as Jesus taught us.

But then again there are those Republicans or those Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, Gay or Straight, Mexicans, Muslims, White Supremacists, Neo-Nazis, Blacks, Asians, maybe even your neighbor? And what about women?

Think about how women are being treated in our society today - at work, in Hollywood, in politics, in schools and in church? Then consider how Jesus treats this story and in all the Gospels.

Who in the world that God so loves, might you hate, despise, look down on, avoid, judge, blame? These things are pretty easy thing to do, even if we don't call it "hate". Love, as God loved, is much harder.

Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of darkness. But it is now noon time. Jesus and his disciples have ventured into the world...they have crossed into enemy territory, Samaria. Jesus is hungry and thirsty. The disciples go to get food. Jesus is alone - and thirsty. A lone Samaritan woman comes to Jacob (Israel) Well.

Can you say - "Awkward"!