

“A Dangerous Way to Live”

John 4:5-26

Last week, in John’s Gospel, we heard about Nicodemus – who came to Jesus “at night”, he was “in the dark”. Remember that John loves detail. Nicodemus is in the dark, but he thinks that he is one of the enlightened ones. John contrasts that with the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus speaks during the daytime. John really knows how to pull the accounts of Jesus’ life together in order to make a point.

A Samaritan woman, and not just any Samaritan woman, but a Samaritan woman who has had a scandalous past is “in the light.” She has had five husbands. From the context, it can be assumed that these marriages ended in divorce, and now she is just living in an openly unrepentant relationship with a man who is not her husband.

Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman have issues with God’s Law. It is the same issues that we have. Nicodemus was a teacher of the Law; he was one of the pillars of the community. He “kept” the Law (in the eyes of society). The Samaritan woman had repeatedly been made to be an adulterer. But keep in mind that, in that culture, only men had the right

to enact a divorce. Five husbands had torn apart what God had joined together. And now she is living as if she is married without actually being married.

Nicodemus is in the dark. The Samaritan woman is in the light (within the context of John's Gospel). Being reconciled to God is not about what you do; it has to do with what you believe – the faith created within you by the Word is the agent which brings change. Nicodemus struggled to believe what Jesus had said about being “born from above.” He was reluctant to believe. He challenged Jesus' words and dismisses them as foolishness (“how can a man enter his mother's womb and be born a second time?”) He rejects being born of “water and the Spirit.”

Thankfully, we know that, later on, Nicodemus publicly displayed his faith as he assists in taking Jesus down from the cross and burying Him. But, for now, although he is a man honored by his community as a keeper of the Law, because of his lack of faith, he remains “in the dark.”

The Samaritan woman was not a keeper of the Law (in the eyes of the community or in the eyes of God). And Jesus calls her on it. But notice that even before he demonstrates her life to be an open book, (and a book that should probably be in the restricted section of the book store), he offers her “living water.” Like Nicodemus, she does not fully understand what Jesus is saying – Nicodemus questioned the idea of being born of

water and the Spirit. Unlike Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman does not dismiss the blessings that the “water” has to offer.

And she was in need of this “Living Water.” She was living dangerously. She quickly and boldly states that she is waiting and watching for the Messiah who, “when He comes, he will tell us all things.” She is longing to hear the Messiah tell her all things, yet, she sits in judgment of Moses and the prophets and treats their words as if they are beneath her as she ignores the Law of God. God’s people are not called upon to keep the Law perfectly. We are called, in faith, to believe that the Word of God (including the Law) expresses the will and desire of God perfectly. To say that His Word, His will, His desire for me doesn’t matter and I don’t care who knows it – that is a dangerous way to live.

The good news for Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (and for all the Nicodemus’ and Samaritans in the world today) is that your sin has not declared you ineligible to receive the grace of God. Jesus could have justifiably spoken very harshly to the both of them for their misbelief, incomplete belief, rejection and dismissal of the clear Word of God. But He chose to promise them a new life, a new reality in the promises connected with water. Nicodemus comes to faith. The Samaritan woman and her entire village come to faith. The Spirit created belief where there was once

confusion and doubt. Don't give up on those in your life who are struggling in confusion and doubt.

Like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, we have been promised and we have received the great blessing of forgiveness and eternal life. And this promise is joined with water. Greet each day with confidence in your Baptism.

With this ongoing scare concerning this new form of flu (and especially for the people who are most at-risk) there is a lot of talk, and it is sound advice, you need to wash. These past two weeks, thinking about these two accounts from John's Gospel with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman – being born of water and the Spirit and receiving “living water” – you can't help but think of Baptism.

I encourage you to remember your own Baptism. You are washed. You are clean. There is a great promise which has been attached to water. But not just any water. As Luther says in his Small Catechism: This is water “included in God's command and combined with God's Word.”

Have confidence in your Baptism. Have confidence in the Word of God. Have confidence that whatever disease or obstacle is placed before us as individuals or as a society, God is in control, and you have been washed. Amen.