

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Third Sunday of Lent
Saturday, March 26, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 27, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Christ is Indeed the Savior of the World”

John 4:5-30; 39-42

In our Gospel lesson today, we witness something that is a rarity in Christ’s ministry. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He was continually sought after and people came in massive numbers to see Him perform a miracle, heal the sick, or simply to witness this man of great charisma about whom everyone was talking.

But there in Samaria, after the people had heard that Jesus had told this woman “all that she ever did,” they wanted Jesus to stay, not to perform more miracles, but so that they could hear His words for themselves. And after listening to the teachings of Jesus for two days, they said to the woman who first told them about Jesus: “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Miracles may peak our interest, but it is only the Word of God that causes faith to occur. These Samaritans demonstrate that there is a huge difference between hearing about God and hearing the Word of God.

Throughout the Gospels, we witness people who praised and honored Christ with great joy. We see the people on Palm Sunday

who praised God and welcomed Jesus and sang “Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Where were all of those people on Good Friday? The Jews who witnessed the miracles of our Lord did not trust in His words in the way that these Samaritans did.

The Jews knew Jesus only as the “bread king” who could feed them 5000 at a time, and as the miracle worker who healed the sick. When the authorities arrested Him, the Jews joined in the chorus, “Crucify Him!”

The disciples lived with Him for three years, but they never paid attention to Him when He said that “he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” [Mt. 16:21]. All of the times that Jesus predicted His suffering and death, the disciples did not want to hear that Word. When He was arrested, put on trial, and crucified, all but John deserted Him, and even he remained silent. It was not until after Christ’s resurrection that the disciples finally started to show an understanding of God’s Word.

The disciples find Jesus speaking to this Samaritan woman. You have to understand that most Jewish men would hardly speak to their wife in public; let alone another woman; and certainly not a Gentile. But the disciples have at least wised up enough to keep their mouth shut and not ask the questions that John records they clearly wanted to ask: “Why are you talking to her?”

The only time a man would speak to a strange woman was when he was seeking out, shall we say, a woman of poor reputation. And He found one. And we see fulfilled in His call to faith the truth of His words throughout His ministry, "I have come to seek and to save the lost."

Throughout history, people have always wanted to keep their preconceived notions of who God is, rather than discovering who God is from God Himself. In other words, it has always been mankind's desire to create God in man's image. We like to define God and God's will by our standards, rather than by the truth of God's Word.

That way, we never get put into a position like the Samaritan woman at the well who had the most glaring sins of her life exposed. This is why Christ's church has always had the confession of sin as a part of its liturgy, where we say, "I am a poor, miserable, sinner...I have sinned in thought, word, and deed."

Our sins need to be exposed before God. Because, then, like the woman at the well, we receive God's "living water" -- that "spring of water welling up to eternal life." That "living water" is the forgiveness found in our baptismal promise and in our baptismal faith created when the Word was joined with that water.

These Samaritans apparently understood something that the Jews did not -- that a miracle worker was not going to make any real lasting change in their lives. The healing that they needed was forgiveness for their sins. When we begin to understand the fullness of

God's forgiveness, only then do we begin to understand God and the message found in His Word.

The people who have only heard about God have no relationship with Him, and have no understanding of the depth of His mercy and grace. There are so many in the world who see God as either an unloving, vindictive giver of the Law -- holding people to impossible standards, or as a universal forgiver, the awesome Big Guy in the Sky, who has no standards and welcomes everyone into the kingdom of heaven.

But the people of God, who know Christ, are very much like the people of that Samaritan village. We have asked Christ to remain with us and teach us the truth of His Holy Word. We have had the most embarrassing sins of our lives exposed before God Himself, and we give Him thanks and praise because we know that He has taken away our sins and He will never accuse us of them again.

We have received Christ's "living water." We have received forgiveness for all of our sins in His life-giving body and blood. We have heard the Word of God and have believed it. We have not just heard *about* God. We have heard *from* God Himself and now know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Savior of the world. Amen.