

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, March 15, 2020
Third Sunday in Lent
Rev. Mark McLennan

“DRINK UP!!”

The Gospel doesn't even record her name, simply a woman from Samaria.

People like her were considered outcasts, inferior, and perhaps not even regarded as persons, but so were many who were attracted to Jesus.

After all, they all look alike don't they?

She was not considered a person in her own right, just one of "**them**."

It is always easier to ridicule or criticize the "*other side*" if we strip them of personality or just paint over their individuality by giving them the same personality, with a one-size-fits-all label.

Have you ever noticed the enemy is always "**they**" and never an individual?

We put a mask on **them** so we don't have to deal with **them**.

Jesus didn't react that way; he always saw a person, whether a young child or a tax collector, a disabled person with a withered hand, or a blind man, or a woman at the well.

He saw more than the mask of their assigned place, the mask they wore to hide behind.

Obviously, there were barriers between this woman and Jesus.

They were not of the same gender or ethnic group.

One Jew and one Samaritan separated by almost centuries of hostility towards each other.

Just as Jesus saw the woman, and not her assigned role or mask, he would not let her hide there either.

He treated her as an individual. She had to face herself and not blame others.

What Jesus did that day at the well was to lead that woman of Samaria to face herself.

This type of boundary crossing is misunderstood by most.

The disciples, the chosen twelve, the closest followers of Jesus, were taken aback.

Some have called this woman the first evangelist in the church.

She found in Jesus what she desperately needed, and the Gospel tells us later in the fourth chapter of John that many from her village believed because of her testimony.

How different it would have been if she had stayed in her comfort zone behind the mask.

Think for a few moments about those times in your life that when seeing the mask and not the person effects how we care and how we live.

We speak of what might be different if the woman had not been willing to be open.

Now also think what would have been different if Jesus had responded as the disciples did later, when they found him with the woman.

Our prejudices and our conditioned responses affect us much as an Invisible Fence System does a dog that is restrained without chain or fence.

It is safe and effective for all breeds and sizes, but will not hurt others who cross the line.

Our prejudices and conditioned responses do the same in controlling our lives.

The mask that we assign to another or that we wear, changes the way we see the world.

The mask will limit us, distort our view; we can't see beyond the immediate problem or moment.

A man went to the doctor and received the news he only had six months to live. *"What am I going to do, Doc?" "Well," the Doctor said, "I would recommend you move to Saskatchewan and buy a farm with at least 200 pigs and marry a widow with ten children."* The man asked, *"Does that mean I will live longer than six months?" "No," the doctor replied, "but it will seem like ten years."*

As Jesus saw through the mask of the woman, he could see a greater need, a greater thirst than just the water from the well.

God sees in each of us something greater, something more.

The mask we see on the other is often the mask the world tells us to see.

The danger in our society is when certain political or interest groups want to assign a litmus test to determine what is or is not Christian.

The danger is when we accept unchallenged the prejudices and fears of others.

Rather than taking the world's word for it, there is nothing like firsthand experience.

There has to be face-to-face contact with the groups or races or nations that we were taught to fear or suspect.

People with ordinary human problems become less threatening when we treat them as ordinary humans.

Think of the mask the woman at the well hid behind.

Even in the most protected environments, we can be confronted.

As with the invisible fence, it might keep the dog in; but it doesn't keep other dogs or children out.

Just think what she almost lost - until confronted by Jesus.

We can be blinded by prejudices, such as - racism, ageism, sexism, nationalism.

The fear of the strange man who was Jewish speaking to her almost blocked her from the greatest moment of her life.

The fear of the unknown can take so much from us.

There is nothing more deadly to receiving the Spirit of God, than a mind and heart sealed in fear.

We can be blinded by our limited knowledge.

She could see that he didn't have a bucket. *"How are you going to give me water?"* she wondered out loud.

We can be fenced off by the past.

She was measuring by the faith of a father of the faith, Jacob, who had lived twenty centuries before.

Just now, she was coming to grips with faith as opposed to hiding in fear.

How easy it is for us to hide behind the unexamined.

To hide behind "*We have never done it that way before.*"

Why don't we witness? - because maybe we are not sure of what we are witnessing.

We can be blinded by the immediate.

The woman might have thought - *if I don't need this water I could stop bringing this jar and rope every day.*

I wouldn't have to struggle with carrying it home.

I would not have to stand out anymore because the others would not let me come with them to get this water.

Dr. Wiley Stephens

A reporter once asked the great opera singer Marion Anderson to describe the proudest moment of her life.

She has many to choose from:

- there was the day the great Toscanini said she had the finest voice of the twentieth century,
- there was the time she sang at the White House to entertain the King and Queen of England,
- and there was the Easter Sunday she had stood at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial and sang before 75,000 people.

How did Marion Anderson respond to the question,

- "*The proudest moment of my life was the day I walked into my house and told my Mama that she didn't have to take in washing anymore.*"

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There is nothing wrong with making life easier, but don't sell the power of God short; there were greater miracles awaiting this sister at the well.

We all have a need to be redeemed.

Sometimes we think we can get rid of an issue by merely ripping the label off and calling it something else, but there is still the need to be redeemed.

We cannot save ourselves.

When we try, it is like being caught in quick sand, the more we struggle the deeper we get.

The woman at the well had to deal with her image of herself and what others had pushed on her.

Let me ask you: **Where in your life have fears caused you to hide from others and even yourself?**

Where do you thirst for more and where are you confronting those times that have forced you to hide behind a mask?

One of the things we who follow Christ celebrate is the gift of the living water.

We know that God is a part of our lives so that we can drop the mask that we have all hidden behind at times, that fear has built, and go forth into the future in faith.

The woman of Samaria was so excited she left behind what was in all likelihood one of her most prized possessions, her water pitcher.

Wiley Stephens

There is an East African story of a woman that always walked around with a Bible; she never parted with it.

Someone asked, why always the Bible, there are so many books you could read.

Neither disturbed nor angered by all the teasing, she knelt down and lifted the Bible up high, and said,

"Yes, of course there are many books I could read, but there is only one book that reads me."

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Life is so much more than the immediate. We live on a much larger scale.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, *"Suffering is a part of living, but we know that suffering will produce endurance."*

And from the strength of endurance comes the core of who we are, - **character**.

And being able to be true to our core will give us hope for the future.

That woman so many years ago, beside that ancient well, found herself; and by dropping the mask of fear, she was able to claim a **lifesaving faith**.

This is good news for us today, that we can drop the masks we have hidden behind, our fears can be banished, and we, too, can claim that Jesus gift.

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again," John writes, "but those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty. The water I give them will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

We are finding God in our lives when we are honest with ourselves, with who we really are and with who others really are as well.

Come and drink the living waters.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST, AND SPIRIT...AMEN