

“That’s Queer”

June 6th, 2021
John 4: 1-40 CEV

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Thank you to Pastor Doug Warren for reading our scripture this morning. It’s a long story but I didn’t want to shorten it. In fact, I was tempted to have you read John chapter 3 *and* chapter 4! This is Pride Month and these two chapters have something teach us as we celebrate Pride.

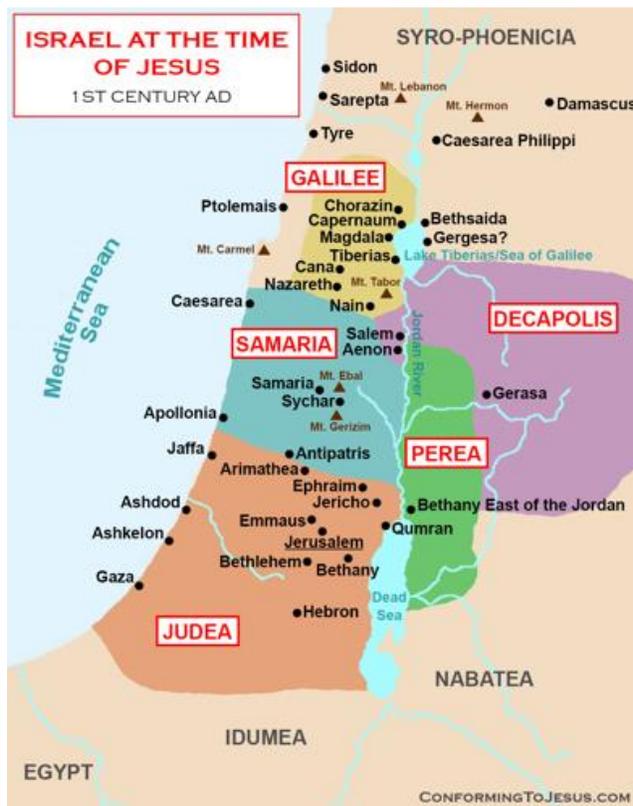
The beginning of John 3 has the story of Nicodemus and as you just heard chapter 4 has the story of the Samaritan woman Jesus meets at the well. Both of these stories tell us a lot about Jesus—about what he loved and valued—but they are almost opposite stories. I want to start off by comparing them.

Just to recap, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, who came to Jesus at night to try to understand who Jesus was and where Jesus got his power from.

Nicodemus is a Jewish religious leader. At that time the religious leaders were not just people you turned to for spiritual advice, they also governed how you lived. Yes, the Romans also did that, but in so much of their daily life the Pharisees told the people how they could live: what they could eat and wear, and how and when they could work. So, Nicodemus is a respected person and a man with power and education and privilege.

It would be hard to find a more different person to Nicodemus than the woman-at-the-well. Start with the obvious, she is a woman and, in the scripture reading, she doesn’t even have a name. We only know her race or nationality. She is a Samaritan. Samaritans were so close and yet so far from Jewish people. Samaritans used to be part of the twelve tribes of Israel. They have the same history but thousands of years before this time they had a family split. They didn’t like the king and the north split from the south into two kingdoms and from there, their cultures and their way of practicing religion began to grow further and further apart. As sometimes happens their closeness almost drives them further apart. Sometimes it’s easier to get along with people who are radically different from you than it is to get along with people who are like you, but disagree with you on things you care about. Jews did not believe there was anything redeeming about the Samaritans.

Not only was this woman a woman and a Samaritan, and so in the eyes of a Jewish person lesser than, she was also lesser-than in her own community. We know this because she goes to the well to get water alone at noon. In a desert country no one fetches water in the heat of the noon-day sun. It was a social event that happened in the morning and in the evening but clearly, she was not welcome or didn't feel welcome to go at those times. We get a hint in the story as to why. She has had 5 husbands and she living with, and not married to #6. This woman has multiple layers of being marginalized: gender, race, and not fitting in because of who she has and is sleeping with.



This leads us to the setting. The encounter with Nicodemus takes place in Judea. That is the center. Judea is where Jerusalem is. In the book of Revelation Jesus is called “The Lion of Judah”. Judah is the center. Jesus travels out from Judah and returns for his death and resurrection.

The story of the Woman-at-the-Well takes place far from the center – in fact outside the boundary lines in the city of Sychar in Samaria. This was curious. What was Jesus doing there anyway? The beginning of the chapter says that Jesus decided to go to Galilee and then it says: “*But he had to go through Samaria.*” It’s a funny

statement because he totally didn't have to go through Samaria.

It is true that going through Samaria was the fastest and most direct route to Galilee however for centuries Jewish people took the long route around Samaria. That was the standard practice. What Jesus did was strange and uncustomary.

One story takes place where Jesus ‘belongs’ and one where he does not belong. One where he would be expected to be and one where his

acquaintances on Facebook might be reacting with 'sad' or 'angry' instead of 'like'. What was a good Jewish boy doing in a place like that?

To continue with the setting, the first story with Nicodemus takes place at night and the other in broad day-light.

Another thing to notice is that Nicodemus doesn't understand what Jesus is saying. Jesus says to him: "You are a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?" While the woman is surprised at Jesus being there and what he is saying, she gets it. She sees it. She understands who Jesus is. After her encounter with Jesus, she runs back to the city, without even getting the water she came for and tells everyone and anyone who would listen: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

What does this tell us about Jesus? Who does Jesus see?

Jesus sees the woman-at-the-well and this isn't a case of pity. Jesus genuinely saw her. And saw her worth.

Jesus sees both Nicodemus and the woman-at-the-well but Jesus makes an effort to go to the one who has no name, to the one who has no worth in the eyes of the world. Jesus makes time for Nicodemus but he doesn't pursue Nicodemus. He does not seem to care that being with Nicodemus would give him respectability and an audience with important people. He also does not care about what people might say about him talking with a Samaritan woman – even his disciples were "astonished that he was speaking with a woman".

But I don't think it is simply about Jesus lifting up the lowly as Mary sang in the Magnificat. Jesus saw her true worth.

When you compare what difference Nicodemus and the Woman-at-the-well made to Jesus' ministry it is quite stark. The woman runs in broad daylight and tells everyone about Jesus and as a result crowds came to see for themselves. Verse 41 and 42 read: "*And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."*" (John 4:41-42) Jesus knew that when he truly saw her and lifted up her value, she would be a fearless leader who would bring many more into a relationship with God.

Nicodemus on the other hand continues to follow Jesus quietly and cautiously—he is too afraid to follow openly. He is still there and he shows

up again at the end of Jesus' life and spends a fortune on spices for the body of Jesus. Nicodemus loves Jesus and Jesus loves Nicodemus.

I want you to see that every Jewish family expecting a baby would hope and pray to have a son who would grow up to be like Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was the gold standard in the eyes of the Jewish world.

The woman-at-the-well was night and day different from Nicodemus. She was strange. Perhaps we might even say queer.

The word queer used to mean strange and was used for anything out of the ordinary. The word began to be used as a slur against gay people. But at some point, the LGBTQ2Spirit community adopted the term as their own and began to celebrate it. Queer is a noun that is sometimes used to replace the whole LGBTQ2Spirit acronym. I have heard people say I am a queer transgendered woman. But queer has also been turned into a verb. To queer something means to shake things up or to do something to bring diversity and difference and colour to a situation.

Queering also means to remove the opposites – to remove the binaries. Our world loves binaries: woman or man, black or white, rich or poor, straight or gay, Nicodemus or the Woman-at-the-Well. But Jesus removes binaries as Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:27-28)

This is Pride month and Pride Sunday. Because I have more in common with Nicodemus, I don't pretend to fully understand all of the nuances of gender and sexual diversity and fluidity.

But I can see that the one I follow; Jesus, is not afraid of what is queer. The one I follow pursues and loves what is queer. As a church it is tempting to stick with Nicodemus – he's safe. But we are not called to safe. We are called to follow. We are called to follow Jesus beyond the walls, beyond the boundaries and to colour outside the lines. Because that is where God already is. There is a world who will only know the joy and the life of a relationship with Jesus as we are willing to follow Jesus; to help create a bridge of love to those who have traditionally been outside the church, and as we use our eyes to see the true worth of the queer community. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, happy Pride month.



1986 Apology to Indigenous Peoples

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

The Right Rev. Bob Smith General Council 1986 The United Church of Canada