

March 27 2011

SCRIPTURE: Hebrew Bible: Exodus 17: 1-7

Gospel: John 4: 5-42

MEDITATION: Worship OUGHT to be about truth.

A great theologian, William Willimon said this: “Worship ought to be spiritual. It ought to be appropriately religious and uplifting. And of course, worship ought to be about truth. Gathering to celebrate our collective illusions and lies is not worship – it is sad delusion.” I like that. To often we come to church in our middle class respectability expecting that there will be pleasant words and music and prayers all wrapped in peace and stability, good order and decorum. We become “uncomfortable” if there is too much of that potentially disruptive Spirit. Rather than hearing the truth in scripture, we want to be lulled with words that reassure us rather than challenge us at our very deep being. We want it all to be “nice” and yet we know, especially in this time of Lent, that this story of our Saviour’s human life is anything but “pleasant”. It is full of betrayal, and violence, fear and horror. Something like REAL life for many in our world. Here in the relative peace of our continent we can easily forget that this REAL life is in fact the reality for so many human beings. We just don’t have to see it, or acknowledge it. We can turn off the news and turn on some frivolous “reality TV” that makes us laugh or maybe snicker in contempt. Willimon says that “the heart of worship is in those ecstatic moments when we are transported, lifted out of our selves, when it is as if a gentle breeze, or sometimes a destructive, powerful hurricane blows through our lives, Worship is when we are encountered by Jesus. ... when he shows up when we have a sense that Jesus has intruded, arrived, taken a seat beside us, that’s worship in truth.” AND that is what makes a difference in our lives, changes us, transforms us and our lives, and we might just have learned the lessons taught. That’s true worship!

The scripture teaches us in story. We hear the stories and ask ourselves where are we in the story? Who are we? What is the story teaching us about us and our lives? In Exodus the people are pretty unlovable. Here they are in the desert faced with their first crises since God delivered them from slavery. God has already shown them that trust will bring them out of an impossible situation and that Moses has been able to perform miracles through his faith and trust in God. The complaints of the people make a sound a lot like us. It’s easy to credit God with blessing you and to have faith in God when things are going well. But what happens when we, like the Israelites, have experienced great deliverance and go happily on our way only to eventually come up against another challenge. What happens to us when the barn or the house burns down or drought threatens our crops or cattle, or we lose our job or our life partner – it’s a different story for us just like it was for our ancient ancestors? That was Israel’s situation. Moses was a hero as long as things were going well. As soon as people got thirsty, with no water in sight, his leadership and personal safety became threatened.

And what about Moses? Can we see ourselves in his place? These people are really getting unlovable to him – his very safety is in jeopardy. Moses gets a bit testy with God

as well in his own panic. God did provide what was wanted at a most unlikely place, but Moses paid for his temper tantrum – he isn't going to get into the promised land – after all this self sacrifice and risk taking – he isn't going to get the big pay off! Can we relate our own lives to Moses? Do we sometimes feel that God is letting us down – even though we have done everything we could to have a good outcome? We too make great sacrifices in our lives – for the good of others – and sometimes, often even, we don't get credit or reward for this. Does this sometimes push us to the place of justification for selfish action?

Then Jesus speaks to us in story. That is so often how he taught the people of his time. That is why I have read you the long story in the Gospel. Sometimes we need to hear about Jesus' encounters with the people in his time to HEAR what he is teaching us in our time.

Jesus breaks several social conventions by engaging a Samaritan woman in conversation. Though Samaritans and Jews shared an early common history their subsequent rivalry brought enmity and violence. By the first century, Jews considered Samaritans heretics and enemies. Furthermore, no self-respecting Jewish male, especially not a rabbi, would engage an unknown woman in conversation. In speaking with a woman Jesus was breaking strong taboos. The Samaritan woman's question about the true place of worship is key to resolving differences between Jew and Samaritan. Jesus points her beyond that conflict to what they have in common, and awareness of God as Spirit. Jesus reveals himself to the woman as the Messiah who brings this Spirit awareness to people. Realizing that she has encountered a transformative person the woman returns to her village as a witness. She invites the people she meets to come and encounter Jesus themselves.

So where are we in this story? Are we the Samaritan woman, amazed and enriched by this encounter with Jesus? Do we too go out and tell others about our amazement? That is our job, that is what we are called to do. We as followers of Christ are meant to spread this word. We are meant to do the teaching for those who do not know this great good news. Today we experienced again the amazement of baptism. We experienced again the mystery and joy of Christ with us in this sacred moment. We are reminded again that we are called to support Eve and Ava in their on going journey and to support their family as they seek ways to teach these beautiful young children about the life and work of Jesus. We must do this work. We are called and equipped to do this. May it be so! AMEN