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We Have Heard for Ourselves

St. John 4:27-43

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March 18, 2012 — Lent 4

As we continued our look at John 4 last Sunday, we saw the Samaritan woman leave her water jug at the well and run into town. She was excited as she shouted to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this by the Christ?" She had experienced the grace of God in her life as she heard the Good News of forgiveness of sins. Remember that the townspeople weren't her friends. They had shunned her because she was a sinner and yet, having experienced the Gospel, she didn't care that they didn't like her. She ran to share that life-changing Good News with them. She wasn't even ashamed of her sins anymore—the fact that Jesus knew her sin was at the centre of her witness. We saw last week that her exuberance to carry Jesus' living water to others—even to her enemies—was one of the signs of true conversion—of the regeneration and renewal of her heart and mind by the Holy Spirit.

Being witnesses is at the core of our faith. I think it's safe to say that we're all familiar with Jesus' "Great Commission" at the end of St. Matthew's Gospel. There he told his disciples to go out and make disciples of all the nations. That's the "famous", well-known passage. But if we look at the parallel passage in St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus says this:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins *should be proclaimed in his name to all nations,* beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-47)

Notice how in Luke, Jesus walks us through the Gospel as he commissions us: Christ suffered; Christ rose from the dead on the third day; and the message of repentance and forgiveness should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. We tend to think of the Gospel as just part of that message: Jesus died, Jesus rose, Jesus offers forgiveness through the repentance of sins. We know that we should take that Gospel to others, but we don't often think of the *taking* as part of the Gospel itself. And yet here in Luke 24 Jesus makes the taking part of the Gospel itself. How often is it enough for us that we've repented and been forgiven? Let someone else tell other people about it. Jesus reminds us that we are the ones he has called to share the Good News. The Samaritan woman reminds us too by her example. She believed and the first thing she did was run off excitedly to tell everyone else. Being a witness of Jesus is just as much a part of being a Christian as repentance, faith, and forgiveness.

We see an example in Jesus too. Remember that when he and his disciples first arrived at the well, Jesus had stayed behind—he knew there was a woman coming and that he needed to talk to her—and the disciples walked into the town to buy lunch. It's not that Jesus wasn't hungry—I'm sure he was famished; he simply knew that there was something more important than food right then. And we saw last Sunday that it was when the disciples came back with food that the woman ran off to tell the townspeople about Jesus. You might think that at that point the disciples might at least ask Jesus, "Wow was she ever excited. What's up with her?" But no. John tells us in verses 31 to 33:

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?"

"Wow, Jesus, look at that lady run. What a 'Jesus Freak'! Hey, do you want something to eat?" And I can see Jesus raise an eyebrow and say, "I've got food you don't know about." And then whichever disciple it was who thought he was doing a big favour for Jesus by bringing him lunch that day looks around at the others: "Hey! Today is *my* day to bring the Master lunch. Which one of you guys sneaked him a sandwich?!?" They didn't get it. They were worried about lunch. He was worried about lost souls.

Have you ever been so engaged in something that you skipped a meal? Or do you ever get so into something that you're oblivious to everything else? Being married to a musician I've learned that when the musician is playing her instrument and you want to tell her something, you have to make sure you've got her attention first. If you haven't got it, she won't hear anything you say. I had a roommate in University who would become so engrossed in his piano playing that you could be standing right in front of him and even though his eyes were open and he was looking right at you, he had no idea you were there. Jesus was kind of like that when it came to saving souls. His *passion* is our salvation.

Jesus was watching the woman go off to share his living water. I expect he was praying for the people she would tell and that he was thinking about what he would say to them when she brought them back to the well. He was so focused on his saving message that when his friends offered him food he responded to them with those words: "I have food to eat that you do not know about." Who wants to eat when something so exciting is happening?

In contrast I can think of times when I had a wide open door to share the Gospel with someone and I let my love of the world's things have my attention instead. I think we could forgive Jesus if he'd stopped to have something to eat. He was hungry and food is something that's necessary for our survival. He was so excited about what was happening with this woman that he wasn't interested in eating. But how often are we distracted by things that are utterly non-essential in our lives? And yet Jesus again says in verse 34:

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

Rick Phillips says, "These two priorities consumed His mind and heart: He was

committed to acting in conformity with God's will and to completing the task God had given Him to do. This commandment on Jesus' part sets an agenda for how we, too, can lead fulfilling lives despite hardships or trials—by committing ourselves to godly living and faithful service to God."

In contrast we live for our own agendas, for worldly amusements, for worldly success, and for sinful pleasures. This struck me upside the head years ago when I realised one day that I could quote more lines from my favourite TV shows than I could from the Bible. Where was I devoting my time? Where was my focus? I admit that I found a certain enjoyment in putting so much time into worldly things, but I realised that the joy the world gives me is nothing compared to the joy that comes from serving God—that comes from being a faithful witness of the Gospel and seeing the Holy Spirit bear fruit in the lives of the people around me. Brothers and sisters, *our* food should be to do the will of the one who has sent us and to accomplish his work—just as it was with Jesus.

And as we look at what happened on that day all those years ago in the Samaritan town of Sychar we should be inspired to go out and do God's work. In verses 39-41 John tells us.

***Many* Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.**

Would we be more engaged and active in sharing the Gospel if we new many people would believe because of our sharing and our witness? There are a lot of reasons we don't do evangelism and one of the biggest is that we're afraid that people won't respond—or that they'll respond negatively and put us in an uncomfortable position, that they'll think we're just "crazy Jesus freaks" or something. If that's what we're afraid of, look at this woman's witness. There are three real points of encouragement for witnessing that Jesus gives us in the context of this story.

First, he reminds us that his coming brought a spiritual harvest to the world. In verse 35 he asks his disciples:

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

He's saying, "The growing season is over. It's time to bring in the harvest." It's a reminder to us that Jesus and his Holy Spirit have been and continue to be at work in the hearts and minds of the people around us. Seeds have been planted. The Spirit has been growing them and now he calls us to harvest the crop. I'd always thought of Jesus' looking over the fields as he said those words, pointing to a ripe harvest of wheat. But this week I ran across a quote from H.V. Morton. He was a famous journalist who wrote about his experiences travelling around the Middle East and the Holy Land. He writes, "As I sat by Jacob's Well a crowd of Arabs came along the road from the direction in which Jesus was looking, and I saw their garments shining in the sun. Surely Jesus was speaking not of the earthly but of the heavenly harvest, and as He spoke I think it likely that He pointed along the road where the Samaritans in their white robes were assembling to hear his words."

Consider how unlikely it was for a town of Samaritans to be coming to hear a Jewish rabbi preach. These people were enemies. To top it off the woman doing the witnessing was an outcast from the town. And yet it happened because Jesus' coming brings a great harvest of souls. How often do we fail to trust that Jesus is bringing about a harvest of souls around us? And because we don't trust that he's working, we fail to share the Good News.

Second, Jesus uses the Samaritan woman's success to tell us how great the reward is for our witness. He says in verse 36:

Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

Jesus reminds us that the fruit of the harvest is *eternal life*. That's in distinction to eternal death. We forget that and we lose perspective. Without the Gospel people will die eternally—they will go to hell. The Samaritan woman was a sinner bound for hell, but Jesus cared enough about her to share his message of eternal life. He saved her soul and she was naturally so excited about it that she ran, even to the people who despised her, because she knew they were bound for eternal death and she wanted to share with them how they could find eternal life. That's what should be behind our evangelism. *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.* Somehow as we go along as Christians we lose sight of the wretchedness of our sins and the amazingness of God's grace and we stop sharing it with others. We forget that we were once bound for hell and that those who don't know the Gospel are still bound for hell. He forget just how high the stakes are…and we stop witnessing. Jesus reminds us that the souls of men and women are at stake—souls he loved enough to die for.

Third, Jesus tells us that much of the time we will be reaping where others have sown. Look at verses 37 and 38:

For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

We see this with the people of Sychar. Jesus wasn't the first one to come and share the message of God's saving grace with these people. John the Baptist had been preaching not far away. No doubt some of these men and women had heard him. We also know that even though the Samaritans rejected much of

what we know of as the Old Testament, they embraced the Pentateuch—the first five books from Genesis to Deuteronomy. They knew the stories of redemptive history. Seeds had been planted for many years. Jesus and the woman brought in the harvest. We can gather that even the seeds the Jesus and the woman planted that day would be reaped later. In Acts 8 we're told that St. Philip, the first deacon, travelled to Samaria and led many people to faith in Jesus—some of them may have first heard about him through the people of Sychar.

When our witness saves someone, it may be that we are reaping a harvest the seeds of which were planted long ago by someone else. Again, Jesus tells us, "I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor." The fact is that no one at all would be saved if Jesus hadn't first sown the seed of his own life on the Cross. We can reap because he has sown forgiveness through his own blood.

But by the same token, if sometimes we reap where others have sown, we know that there will be times when we sow seeds—or water seeds that have already been planted—so that someone else down the road can do the reaping. We're called to be faithful witness. That's our job. Remember that it's the job of the Holy Spirit to grow those seeds and bring them to fruit. Our evangelism may not bear fruit right away. That's not a reason to become discouraged.

Ten years ago when we were starting our mission in Portland there was one Sunday when I received this message loud and clear and it gave me a lot of comfort. As we planned to start the mission we had a lot of positive contacts in the community, but when it actually came to time to holding services most of them disappeared. I've learned that in church planting you can only expect about ten percent of your contacts to actually show up. When we got things going it was our family and one other. One particular Sunday a couple of months into things I found myself at church alone. Veronica's mom was sick and so she and Alexandra had gone to Kelowna. The other family had another commitment and so they weren't there. I didn't want to cancel the service because I'd had several email contacts during the week from people who said they might come to check us out. Since Veronica was gone I talked to the pastor of the Lutheran church we were renting and he put me in contact with an elderly lady who was one of their backup organists. She was happy to come and help that day.

Well, the time for the service came and she and I sat and waited…and waited. No one came. She insisted on playing a couple of hymns that we sang to and we knelt and said Evening Prayer. She could tell how discouraged I was that no one had come and so before leaving she told me about an experience she and her husband had had many years before. It turns out that they had been missionaries many years before in Jamaica. They had been sent out to start a church. She said that her husband struggled for several years to pull a congregation together. They had a building, but they were never able to pull together a congregation. They did all sorts of witnessing—lots of seed planting—but there never seemed to be a harvest. They were very discouraged. After several years they moved on to another place where their ministry was more successful. But she said a few years later they were contacted by a minister who had moved into the area where they had had so little success. His church was meeting in their old building. He wanted to thank them for all the seeds they planted and, most of all, for all the time they had spent in that empty building in prayer. When he arrived the harvest was ripe and he reaped the fruit born of all the seeds they had planted. She said that pastor's thanking them completely changed their perspective on what they thought had been wasted years. Sometimes we sow, other times we reap and both are part of the job Jesus calls us to do.

Finally, let's remember the goal. Look at what the people said to the woman in verse 42:

"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Jesus came into the world to die for our sins and to rise to new life that he might deliver us from sin and offer us eternal life. That's why the Gospel is "Good News"—not *just* news, but *good* news. We tell people about the other good stuff we find in life. We evangelise people for computer brands, for car badges, for this restaurant or that hair-cutting place. We happily tell them about things as mundane as Mr. Clean Magic Erasers. And yet we've met Jesus, the Saviour of the world—a man who knows everything we've ever done and still loves us in spite of it all, a man who has died and risen from the grave for us, and who gives us living water; when will be excited to share him with the people around us—with the people around us who are dead and dying in their sins for whom he is the *only* answer? It shouldn't be a hard task. He's given us living water, bubbling up and overflowing. As he said to the disciples: "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together."

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for the love and grace and mercy you have shown us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for forgiving our sins through his sacrifice. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit that we might have new life. Father, forgive us when we take your amazing grace for granted. Fill us every day with your living water, so full that it overflows so that we can't help but share it with the people around us. Transform our lives that we might be faithful and living witnesses of your grace and let us tell the people around us that your Son is the Saviour of the world. Let obedience to your will and faithfulness to your call be our food and drink. We ask this through him who died and rose again for us, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.