

"Lent 3 – Jesus, Who Sees Only Light"

John 4:5-42

JERUSALEM (Reuters) – A bomb planted in a bag exploded near a bus stop in a Jewish district of Jerusalem on Wednesday, killing a woman and injuring at least 30 people, in an attack police blamed on Palestinian militants. No one claimed responsibility for the blast, which coincided with an upsurge of violence on the Gaza border that has led to fears of a new war between Israel and the Islamist group Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, after months of relative quiet. Medics said three people were seriously hurt by the explosion, which hit one of the main routes into central Jerusalem in the afternoon, shattering the windows of a nearby bus. A woman in her 60s died in hospital. Police said it was a "terrorist attack" -- Israel's term for a Palestinian strike. It was the first time Jerusalem had been hit by such a bomb since 2004. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israel would take action against those groups who he said are testing the Jewish state's will to defend itself.

Wednesday, March 23, 2011

We know the story of the Samaritan woman very well... or we think we know it well! Remember, the Gospel of John is filled with images, symbols, and meanings that we must look at deeply to understand, in our own way. Today, this large, Jesus of John speaks again and again of water. And I will talk about Light.

At its heart, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, who is not named, is a story of "Other." As human beings, we are familiar with "Other." If we are liberal, or progressive, we think we see no "Other," but that only blocks our awareness of this primal instinct in human beings. And when we do not know the power of seeing the "Other" in ourselves, we too, do damage in the "Other."

Even as a child, I wondered why some were poor and some were rich. I wondered why the world was run by the powerful and was worked by those without power. In some instinctual way, I knew "Other."

When we study the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, we are often struck by the bloodshed, the violence in its pages, violence given by God and often by those who call out the name of God to do what it is they do to the Other. Today we think about the native peoples who lived on this land thousands of years before Europeans came here and destroyed their world with violence; and in our attempt to see the Europeans as those who killed in the name of "Other," we forget that the native peoples, too, had those they called "Other," those who were from other tribes, whose existence threatened their existence.

Across the globe today we see what is happening in the guise of "Other." The bombing in Jerusalem this week is only one place where "Other" is being destroyed, tortured, raped, even this moment.

Part of our faith is to know our One-ness – our lack of "Other" from God – and our one-ness to other human beings. In faith, "Other" dissolves. And in faith, "Other" dissolves from the inside, out. In the NY Times this week, a young woman from Monaco was quoted about how she views the turmoil in the Middle East. "We can't just say we want change. There must be a change in our minds." That is a statement of faith.

By all accounts, Jesus would not have spoken to the woman at the well in Sychar, Jacob's well. Jesus was tired, the Evangelist named John writes, so he sat down.

I expect Jesus, as a good Jew, a practicing Jew, would not have given eye contact to the woman. Even today, when we pass one another on city streets, we don't often give eye contact to each other. That makes our streets more dangerous, I'm sure. Our refusal to connect with our eyes is another way to avoid "Other."

Instead, Jesus initiates conversation with the woman, who must be startled: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" The Evangelist adds: (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans).

Like the conversation with Nicodemus, filled with innuendo and metaphor, Jesus seems to discuss water with the woman. But the water he speaks about is deeper, deeper water, like that stream of life inside of you, deeper than your worries, deeper than your fears, deeper than your attempts to control your one little world.

To me, here comes the power in the story!

Jesus seems to know about the woman, more than she has told him. We don't know what this is about really, except that this was a woman who had had many husbands. Even today, we notice when someone has many husbands! After all, just this past week we were reminded, again and again, that Elizabeth Taylor had been married 8 times and had seven husbands!

The Samaritan woman, "Other," already by her being a woman and a Samaritan, is further "Other," for she has lived outside the norm of ordinary convention. She has had 5 husbands, Jesus reminds her, but who is counting?!

And this is what I love about the story. Jesus merely allows the woman to know that he has seen her, as she is, sees her through and through, and offers her salvation, healing, wholeness.

Most of us cannot get past what we see in the "Other." We are stuck on their lack, on their difference, on their lack of living according to our expectations, our morality, our world view, our language, our sexuality... the list of what makes "Other," "Other," is endless.

Instead, the woman's life is changed. I expect she is changed, she is healed because Jesus saw her as she was: a human being, frail and full of failings – as we all are frail and full of failings – and he healed her, he made her whole.

In my thinking, Jesus saw only Light. Most of us live inside of our shame, our fear. We think the Light, Life, is far from us. That woman came to the Well wearing her cloak of many husbands around her, and Jesus saw her only as Light. He saw her as healed, as whole.

Go, see only Light.