

Living Word Bible Study (May 28- June 2, 2018)

Monday: [2 Kings 17:24-41](#)

In yesterday's sermon, we saw that the testimony about Jesus from the Samaritan woman at the well led to her entire village proclaiming that Jesus is the Savior of the world. When the woman is surprised that Jesus would address her, the story gives the parenthetical statement "(for Jews do not associate with Samaritans)". The story, coming so early in the Gospel of John, is a clear signal to anyone who would follow Jesus that there are no "outsiders" when it comes to the Kingdom of God – everyone, even people our culture would consider "the other" is invited to be part of it. This week, we will look at stories involving Samaritans, and how Jesus teaches the inclusiveness of His love.

Today's reading from 2 Kings provides much of the background needed to understand the hatred that existed in Jesus' day between Jews and Samaritans. In 930 BC, the Kingdom of Israel fell into civil war and was divided into a northern kingdom based in Samaria, and a southern kingdom based in Jerusalem. Political differences already divided the people, but when Jeroboam, first king of the northern kingdom, set up a rival religious system in Samaria (see 1 Kings 12:25-33), religious differences became the primary source of division. Later Jews, following the traditions of 2 Samuel 24:18-25, insisted that the place to worship God was on Mount Moriah, in Jerusalem, where Solomon had built the Temple, but the Samaritans, following their traditions based on Deuteronomy 12:1-14 and 27:1-13, insisted that the place to worship God was on Mount Gerizim, in Samaria. This was the basis for the woman at the well's question of Jesus in John 4:20. When the northern kingdom fell to the invading Assyrian army in 722 BC, while the southern kingdom was spared, the Jews in Jerusalem took it as a sign that their practice of worship was the right one. Furthermore, as today's reading from 2 Kings portrays, when the Assyrians resettled Samaria, the entire already-questionable religious structure of the Samaritans was further corrupted by Assyrian influences, including the worship of Assyrian gods. Even though Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army in 586 BC, they maintained the purity of their faith while in exile in Babylon, and by 516 BC, they had rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem when the Persians who defeated the Babylonians allowed them to return home. For the next 500 years, animosity between the two peoples only grew as each worshiped God in their own way, at their own temples, on their own mountains.

- What do these stories indicate are some of the primary ways historical differences can lead to hatred between people groups?
- How have you seen political differences and religious differences get intertwined?
- What groups of people do you perceive as "the other", based on political or religious differences?

Tuesday: [Luke 9:51-62](#)

If you have a map of Israel in Jesus' day, it might help to take a look at it to better understand today's reading. Most of Jesus' early ministry took place in the region known as Galilee, on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee. Between Galilee and Jerusalem lay Samaria, which meant that any Jew from Galilee who wanted to go to the Temple in Jerusalem would either have to travel through Samaria (where they were a hated ethnic group) or cross over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, to travel south through the more difficult terrain there, and then cross back over the river to get to Jerusalem in the region known as Judea. Still, this was what most Jews from Galilee would do, simply to avoid contact with the hated Samaritans – many of them would not even allow their sandals to touch the Samaritan ground! But in today's reading, Jesus and His disciples are taking the direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem – right through the heart of Samaritan territory. When Jesus sends His disciples to a Samaritan town to prepare a place for them to stay, "the people there did not welcome Him, because He was heading for Jerusalem". Of course, they didn't! If they were headed to Jerusalem, that meant they were headed for Mount Moriah, and the Jewish Temple there – and that meant they were religious outsiders in Samaria, people who rejected everything about the Samaritan way of life. The xenophobia of James and John is put on graphic display as they ask Jesus if they can call down fire from heaven to wipe these blasphemous Samaritans off the face of the earth in response to their rejection. The significance of Jesus' rebuke of the disciples' attitude here should not be underappreciated. Nor should we underestimate the force of the Greek word that is translated "rebuke" here. Jesus gives James and John a severe reprimand. Rather than contribute to the ethnic hostilities, Jesus prefers to simply leave, and head for another village. But as they travel, Jesus

shows His disciples that their rejection by the Samaritans is among the least of their concerns. Following Jesus will call for sacrifice, dedication, and perseverance.

- Do you think James and John were naïve about what they would encounter traveling through Samaria?
- Do you think what they experienced warranted their reaction? What does this tell you about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day?
- Why do you think the three vignettes about the cost of following Jesus follow this story?
- Why is Jesus more tolerant of how the Samaritans treat them than James and John are?
- What does this tolerance point toward?
- Can you identify people who you would respond to in the same manner that James and John responded to the Samaritans?
- What is your gut reaction when people "do not welcome you" when you bring Jesus to them? How does the story suggest Jesus would have you respond?

Wednesday: [Luke 10:1-24](#)

Immediately after the events of yesterday's reading, Jesus sends seventy-two of His disciples out, two by two, to all the villages He would be traveling through, to prepare them for Jesus' arrival. Notice the warning that Jesus gives, though – it is highly likely that the welcome they receive will be no better than the one they received in the first village of Samaria they had just been to. In fact, it might be worse! The disciples will be like "lambs among wolves". But where the disciples are welcomed, they are to continue the work of Jesus and to tell the people that they are close to the Kingdom of God. But just as Jesus had James and John move on without retaliation in yesterday's reading, if the disciples are rejected when they visit a town, they are simply to "wipe the dust from their feet" and move on – but not without reminding the residents that the Kingdom of God is near for them as well, and that rejecting its arrival in Jesus is tantamount to rejection of God's mercy and salvation.

- What does this story suggest about what we might encounter today when we go out into the world with the invitation to be part of the Kingdom of God initiated by Jesus?
- What does it say about how we are to respond to acceptance or rejection?
- Why do you think Jesus sends the disciples out two by two? What are the implications of that for the way we go out into the world with the message of the Gospel?
- What does the work of preparing others for the arrival of Jesus look like today?

Thursday: [Luke 10:25-37](#)

Isn't it fascinating that just after Jesus and the disciples have traveled through Samaria, and are continuing on their way to Jerusalem having experienced varying levels of rejection from the Samaritans, that Jesus would now tell a parable in which the hero is a Samaritan? The story is familiar even in the secular world. A man is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now Jericho is very near the border between Samaria and Judea – so not only does it make sense that a Jewish priest, a Jewish Levite, and a Samaritan man would be traveling the same road, but it is also, most likely, in the exact vicinity where Jesus and His disciples are currently traveling! In Jesus' story, robbers strip the man naked, take his belongings, beat him, and leave him for dead. Paragons of righteousness, a priest (the Jewish representation of God on earth) and a Levite (a priest's assistant), who anyone listening to the story would expect to stop to help, instead walk by on the other side of the road for their own, unstated reasons. Instead, a despised Samaritan does the right thing, bandaging the man and taking him to an inn to be cared for at his own expense. In telling this story just after their journey through Samaria, Jesus further shatters the expectations of His disciples regarding ethnic and religious differences. Not only has Jesus refused to condone violence against the Samaritans, He has had the audacity to suggest that an individual Samaritan might actually be a better model of righteousness than an individual priest or Levite. In other words, righteousness in the sight of God has nothing to do with race or ethnicity or even religious practice, but everything to do with personal behavior irrespective of those very differences. Love of neighbor knows no boundaries.

- What boundaries limit your understanding of "neighbor"?

- How would you feel if you walked into church one Sunday morning, and the demographic was totally different – representing diversity in every conceivable way? Would you be elated or concerned? Why, in either case?
- When you think about inviting people to church, do you ever find yourself, even unintentionally, limiting the kinds of people you are thinking about?
- Who are the Samaritans in your neighborhood? Are you being a neighbor to them?

Friday: [Luke 17:11-19](#)

In this story, Jesus is still traveling in the borderlands – in this case, the northern boundary between Samaria and Galilee. Ten men with leprosy, who have heard the miraculous stories of Jesus’ healings, cry out to Jesus for Him to have pity and heal them. Jesus does, but only one of the men return to Jesus to offer thanks. In keeping with Jesus’ utter demolition of the disciples’ heartfelt prejudices, this lone appreciative victim of leprosy is also a Samaritan. The only man who returned to praise God was the man whose way of worshipping God was suspect. In spite of the fact that Jesus is a Jew, whose practice of worship is very different from the Samaritan’s, Jesus applauds the Samaritan’s faith. What’s more, the Samaritan who was healed was an outcast from two perspectives – both as a person with leprosy and as a Samaritan. As hard as it may be for us to believe, even within this group of ten, the Samaritan would have been despised for his ethnicity by the Jewish men suffering from leprosy he was with. He was the “outcast among outcasts”.

- What impact do you think Jesus’ comments about the Samaritan man’s faith would have on the disciples?
- What new lessons do you think the disciples were learning from this episode?
- What are the implications for evangelism and outreach that only 10 percent of those who personally benefitted from Jesus’ love and mercy actually responded with praise of God?
- Are you ever offended at the thought of doing acts of mercy and not receiving acknowledgment or thanks?

Saturday: [Acts 1:8](#); [Acts 8:1-25](#)

Notice in Acts 1:8 that the risen Christ tells His disciples that they must witness to Him not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but also in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then, notice two things about the story in Acts 8. First, Philip seems to have no qualms at all about going into Samaria to spread the Gospel. But second, the picture of religious faith in Samaria is consistent with what the Jews imagined Samaritan faith to look like – involving both sorcerers and belief in something known as the “Great Power”. Even John – who, remember, wanted to annihilate the Samaritans in Luke 9 – travels through Samaria with Peter proclaiming the Gospel. Clearly, the disciples have understood Jesus’ teaching! In Acts 8, we see that for these disciples, ethnic and religious barriers have been broken down. If you want to read on, check out the rest of Acts chapter 8! An Ethiopian eunuch – another “outcast among outcasts” to the Jews, both a foreigner and a castrated male, is converted to faith in Christ by Philip as well! When the eunuch asks “is there any reason I should not be baptized?” he is asking, “is faith in Christ open to everyone – even me?” Philip’s answer is an emphatic yes! There is no one ineligible for an invitation to Christ’s love.

- Why do the disciples have a different attitude toward Samaria, and Samaritans, in Acts as compared to Luke?
- What does this suggest about how faith grows and changes as we journey with Christ?
- Where are you in your walk with Christ with regard to inviting others to experience Christ’s love along with you?
- Who are you willing to invite? Where are you willing to go?
- Who WILL you invite?

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