

SERMON: "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD INCLUDING ..."
TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 4:5-42

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Third Sunday in Lent

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INTRODUCTION

Last week I had the opportunity to preach on John 3:16, "For God so loved the world."
Got to throw out chocolates. No chocolates this week. Sorry.
But I do want to and need to follow up from last week, about God loving the world
It is the whole world including those people ... yes, those people.

To talk about those people, let's strike a deal
I'm going to try and give you a literal lay of the land, show you some maps
Show you some pictures too, pictures of Jacob's well, where Jesus
had a most enlightening conversation with one of those people

This is a story about a Jew and a Samaritan. And not just about two people
This is about two peoples plural - Jews and Samaritans then and now.
We're going to talk about the Palestinians in the West Bank in this sermon.
Did you know the land and the people who live there today are still referred to
as Samaria and Samaritans by the Israeli settler movement and their allies today

I'll point to tensions between peoples then, tensions between people now
And your part of this deal ... I'd like you to do the same
Think of those tensions between peoples, think about the people
you may think of as 'those people' the ones you talk about more often
than you talk to, the ones you may think of as a problem, a threat, an enemy

The work you do honestly asking yourself that question "who are those people"
is where you connect the biblical story to your story ... who are your Samaritans.
Do that work and you'll discover God's love for the world includes 'those people'
Isn't that what happened with Jesus and the woman at the well?
Isn't that what happens with Jesus ... everywhere and with everyone?

Ok. Before you object to doing that work, let me address your hesitation
You say you don't think like that. You don't talk bad about people,
don't think bad about anyone. You may be like my friend Margaret Mueller
She was one of the gentlest, most loving and kind people I have ever known.
And I've known a good many people like her

Margaret didn't think or talk bad about anyone ... But she knew that just being good
in your own world and in your own way isn't good enough
The divisions between peoples exist because while some people build
those walls and enflame those tensions, other people do little or nothing
to challenge those stereotypes ... and the walls get built higher

YOU TALKING TO ME?

Jesus' conversation with this woman, one of those people, is there to challenge us
It is the longest conversation that Jesus has with any one person in any
of the four gospels. And what exactly was he doing talking to her in the first place?
She asks that question of Jesus. So too do his disciples.

John tells us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria"
Here let me show you. **Show map – Samaria**
You see how Jesus had to go through Samaria.

So there is Samaria, very much in the way in the middle of things
Why is it there? I'll let the representative from Georgia answer that
Maybe you heard Marjorie Taylor Green suggest it is time for what
she calls 'a national divorce.' Wow, what a bad idea!

This country went through that before, the Civil War. We still have the scars.
You know who else went through a national divorce? Israel!
The Samaritans are one side of that divorce
Show map – Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

The northern kingdoms were called 'Israel,' the southern kingdoms – Judah
The capital of the southern kingdoms – Jerusalem
and the capital of the northern kingdom - Samaria (hence Samaritans)
God's response. God so loved the world, he sent Jesus where?
To Samaria, to that well, to that woman ... to those people

**A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her,
"Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone into the city to buy
food). The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you,
a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"**

How is that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?
In other words ... what are you doing here, talking to me?
I think the answer goes back to John 3:16
God so loved the world including those people. Here let me show you

Let me show you today's Samaria ... that well, Jacob's well.
I've been there. I've tasted that cool water
Show pictures – Sign on Church
Well with attendant, well with pail
Painting of Jesus and woman at well

The well Jesus went to that day was Jacob's well, where Jacob met his wife
It was an important place for the Jews then. And still is today
It is also a place people have been fighting over for a long, long time
One more picture to show you from the church that sits over the well
Painting of man with axe

THIS LAND IS WHOSE LAND?

The man on his knees is the former priest at that historic church
The man with the axe is the Israeli settler who killed him
The painting depicts that brutal murder which took place maybe 15 years ago

That kind of violence in those parts is not limited to that one incident.
That kind of tension between peoples is not limited to Jesus' time
Jesus' love for those people, however we might define them, is not limited either
Not just to that woman that day. It is still all over Samaria and Israel today

What I'd like to do for a few moments today is share a bit about those lands,
those people and those tensions. I do so because it is a core belief of mine
Because Jesus loves 'those people' we are to love 'those people'
Step one in doing so is to get to know them a little better ...
Learn about them, learn from them. Love them. Learning leads to loving.

So let's talk politics, American politics and some of our over-simplifications
Every elected leader in Washington wants to support our ally, Israel
We do so because of shared values, shared history
We do so to support democracy in a part of the world with few democracies.

That said, support of the state of Israel does not have to mean support of all
the policies of the Israeli government. We can and often do see things differently.
We cannot fall into the trap of thinking "Good Israel, Bad Samaria"
Good Israel, Bad Palestine ... or vice versa

That kind of thinking would have Jesus skip Samaria like a fly over state
Jesus went through Samaria and had a nice long chat with a woman of Samaria
They talked together at the community gathering spot, the well
That well is in the West Bank city of Nablus, in occupied Palestine
Show map - West Bank Nablus is here ... in the middle

We intentionally pray the news in our worship together.
I've lifted up prayers for these lands and these peoples for months now
The last year has seen more violence there than any in the last two decades
That violence has spiked recently after two settlers were killed
execution style in broad daylight while they were stuck in traffic

My purpose in preaching like this today is to inform your prayers for 'those people'
All those people, the two settlers that were killed, the 11 Palestinian civilians
that were killed after settlers led a rampage of revenge through Jenin
You see Jenin here up towards Nazareth.

I offer a little history and geography to inform your prayers for all those people
I have handouts with more information about Israel and Palestine
about how different people are treated differently in the holy land
Information about those people ... on the table by the door of the sanctuary

INFORMED PRAYERS

The Oslo accords that brought whatever peace there is in this holy land are now 30 years old (1993). That peace agreement divided the West Bank, the portions of Palestine that Israel annexed following the 1967 war, (excluding the Golan Heights up by Syria and Gaza down by Egypt) into three areas – A, B and C **Show Map – Areas A, B & C**

Area A is under Palestinian control, including security

A few things to notice. These are all cities. The security reasoning behind this is simple. Cities are much harder to control than open ground
Israel wants no part of what could be house by house combat

Israel still keeps an eye and ear on everything in these areas

Daytime raids by Israeli security forces, like those recently, are rare
But they do happen and are very much a part of the tensions

The other thing to notice is that these areas, Areas A, do not connect

The areas in between are meant to be shared control, Areas B. In Areas B, the Palestinian Authority controls government services, Israel the policing.
The Oslo Accords were meant to be a beginning – Areas B would grow and join together Areas A. That growth has not happened.

Areas C are under complete Israeli control. These are the settlements.

Areas A and B have not grown together in large part because
Area C, the settlements, which after 1993 were not meant to grow in number have grown, grown many times over and are still growing today

This is one of the major discussions and divisions in Israeli and international politics

The question of the settlements. The Netanyahu government, in power now (and in power as the longest serving Prime Minister in Israel's history) has made the expansion of settlements a top priority.

Please think back to the picture from the church, the settler and his axe

and the map with the settlements shown. Many more have been added since and think of the news stories about violence between settlers and Palestinians and think back to Jesus daring to talk with a Samaritan woman

The settlers who move to the land and the Palestinians who already live there

are engaged in an ongoing argument that often turns violent ... whose land is it?

The settlers claiming that land fall loosely into two types of people.

Both types are encouraged to settle by the policies of the Israeli government.

One type are those settlers found in the larger high-rise settlements around Jerusalem.

These are the more secular settlers. The encouragement they follow is financial.

The Israeli government wants to seal off the Palestinian Eastern side of the city, claim that land. They incentivize settlers to move there by offering deeply discounted rent in an expensive market, sometimes half the price

LAND & WATER

The other type are settlers who are motivated more by religious reasons
They are convinced the land is theirs to take, it is God's will.
These settlers are therefore more prone to extreme views and to violence
The settlements you see further into the West Bank are where you find
a lot more of these types of settlers – both in legal and illegal settlements

Illegal settlements are those where people just claim the land, move a trailer on to it
and settle there like a squatter. These are the most zealous of the settlers
The new Netanyahu government has vowed to make these illegal settlements
officially legal ... more tensions, more violence, more prayers needed

Wanted to let you know about these land disputes to help you better pray for
and love all 'those people.' Also want to do the same about water
There is plenty in the press about settlements, about the land
But not so much about the water. It is an underreported story.

It's a lesson we are learning in our own country, our own water shortages
Let me share just a few more pictures to talk about the water there
Figured this would be the best sermon to do so – talking about living water
talking about a meeting at a well-known well in the heart of Samaria
and Jesus asking for a cup of water from one of those people

One of the things I noticed on both of my visits were the rooftops of the homes
It is easy to tell the settlements from other communities in the West Bank
Not just the nice roads and the tall security fences ... but the rooftops
Show picture – Settlement rooftops

Israel does not allow the Palestinians who call that land home in Area B to dig wells
The settlements have water systems that tap into the aquifer
Most all the settlements have nice red tile roofs
The Palestinian homes have rain barrels to catch water.
They need them, lots of them. They cannot draw water from below.
Show picture – Rooftop rain barrels

I know this sermon has been a little different, a bit of a travelogue.
My hope has been to help you lift up more informed prayers for the people
who call the Holy Land home, prayers for all 'those people'
After all, isn't prayer a kind of travel that connects the world?

You know Jesus went to and through Samaria
He took the time to talk with this woman, he gave her living water
He entrusted her with the good news which she eagerly shared
Thank God for her. Thank God for those people
They are in need of and worthy of our prayers ... and our love