



# FLOSSMOOR COMMUNITY CHURCH

March 27, 2011

## “SEISMIC CHRIST: WHAT JESUS ALREADY KNOWS”

John 4:5-30, 39-42

Pastor Fred Lyon

When they were little, our children made our refrigerator disappear. Not because they were strong enough to remove it from the kitchen. Not because they cast a magic spell so that it evaporated into thin air.

No, the refrigerator disappeared because of a steady flow of early childhood art by Ben, Jay, and Libby Lyon. This flow of creativity continued until, one day, the refrigerator was so thoroughly covered by our children’s artwork that the appliance just seemed to vanish from sight.

All their art provided a kind of reenactment of human history. Our refrigerator gathered initial evidence of our young ones creating their own view of life around them, keeping track of things, leaving a mark of their own in the world they encountered. With their art—sometimes simply their first attempts at spelling their names in big letters—our children did what human beings have been doing for thousands of years, doing what really makes us *Homo sapiens* fully emerged from pre-cultural existence.

They were beginning to establish a record about themselves, by themselves, for themselves—all to share with others. Those first shakily scrawled, yet recognizable spellings that our children made of their names helped me better understand the profound drive that prompts human beings to make themselves known.

“Here I am. This is who I am. This is my story.”

This drive fills libraries, museums, and theaters. It floods communication via telephone, radio, television, and the internet. It redefines the earth’s landscape with all manner of architecture.

This drive is as ancient as the cave drawings of bull hunts discovered in Lascaux, France. It is as mysterious as the Sphinx, as sublime as the Taj Mahal, as inspiring as the Sistine Chapel.

We all experience this drive. “Here I am. This is who I am. This is my story.” The “high story” of history comprises the countless “my stories” of the human race.

++++++

She must have thought, “What is this guy’s story?”

The Gospel of John records that Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well. He gave her plenty of cause to wonder what he was up to. Apparently along with mad dogs and Englishmen, here was Jesus out in the midday sun.

The Samaritan woman had her own reasons for coming to the well around noon. She wanted to avoid the gossip of judgmental women from town. But it was ridiculous that anybody else would be at the well during the hottest part of the day instead of staying cool indoors. And it was troubling that this man blatantly broke religious and social

taboos prohibiting him from talking with a woman to whom he had never been formerly introduced. Even more, it was preposterous that this Jewish man sat at his leisure right in the middle of what was for him the enemy territory of Samaria.

But the topper must have been what this man was saying. “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water . . . Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Perhaps this fellow had been out in the sun juuust a little too long. But the Samaritan woman played along with him.

With a mixture of good humor and a hint of sarcasm she told Jesus, “Sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” In other words, “Tell me about it. I would love not having to haul water back from the well every day.”

“What is this guy’s story?” she must have thought.

++++++

Then something happened that would forever change the story of the Samaritan woman’s life. Jesus told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.”

The unnerving, earthshaking, seismic thing about this man’s story was and is that before the Samaritan woman ever told him her own story, he already knew it. The good news thing about this man’s story was and is that Jesus already knew the Samaritan woman’s story—knew it thoroughly, knew all the sordid details—yet he respected her, took her seriously, cared about her, sought to introduce her to the possibilities of eternal life. He did not want to merely shake her up. He wanted to redeem and transform her life.

We can only speculate how many times this woman went to the well at noon instead of during the cool of morning or evening when the other village women usually drew water. It was worth it to her to go in the heat of noon just to avoid the gossip and ugly stares of all those village women who knew that her story was bad news.

But here was this complete stranger who already knew all about her, yet treated her with dignity anyway. Instead of the way most men probably talked with this woman so that they could get around to sharing physical things with her, Jesus wanted to talk with her about sharing spiritual things. Jesus already knew her story inside out, yet looked beyond her sorry reputation, looked beyond her enemy status as a Samaritan, and spoke to her of good news and inclusion in God’s purposes—good news and inclusion that shakes up our earthly status in order to brush us up against the holy.

And it redeems and transforms her life.

How does it redeem and transform her life? I believe the clue comes in verses 25-30.

In verse 25, the Samaritan woman shows that she already has a profound piece of spiritual information when she says, “I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus replies in verse 26, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Next, verse 27 begins, “Just then his disciples came.” The disciples appear at the very moment when the Samaritan woman and Jesus are having the exchange about the Messiah. The return of the disciples is only a comment from the narrator of the story between where verse 26 stops and verse 28 picks up. This means that in real time, there is only the briefest of pauses between when Jesus tells the woman he is the Messiah and when she drops everything to return to her village where she proclaims, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

How redeemed and transformed is she? She immediately becomes an evangelist—an agent of good news. It is for just this kind of redemption and transformation that Jesus speaks with her. And it is just his kind of redemption and transformation that answers the question, “Why are you speaking with her?”

Jesus is speaking with the Samaritan woman to shake up her life—precisely by redeeming and transforming her. And because Jesus speaks to redeem and transform this woman, her story becomes our story, namely, the good news story of Christ’s redemptive and transformative love for us, no matter what our various back stories happen to be.

You and I have all sorts of back stories—and Jesus already knows them all. No matter who we are, what we are, what we do, what we have—regardless of our circumstances—this Lord, this Christ, looks us alive in the eye and already knows your story and mine. Christ Jesus already knows us inside out. And, yet, he loves us through and through—loves us even with full knowledge of anything and everything that seems most unlovable about our back stories.

This love will shake us up on the way to redeeming and transforming our lives and our stories. This love gathers us into the body of Christ, equipping us to proclaim together: “Here we are because of Christ. This is who we are because of Christ. This is our story because of Christ.”

This love calls us to know the stories of others. For all around us there are people with nobody to listen to their stories, people who go unknown because their stories are muted, people who need to know the story of Christ Jesus’ love that will not let us go.

+++++++

“Bert, you know me?”

George Bailey speaks these words toward the end of the film “It’s a Wonderful Life.” In this simple question he poses to Bert the cop, George Bailey witnesses to the redemption and transformation of being known. The key to what George has learned from his odyssey with the angel, Clarence, is that he comes face to face with the devastating impact of not ever being known, of literally being nobody.

So in that scene on the snow swept bridge when George has returned from his nightmare and realizes that Bert simply knows who he is, well, Mr. Bailey is a redeemed man, he is a man transformed. And the next time you watch the movie, when you see George Bailey running through the streets of Bedford Falls giddily shouting, “Merry Christmas,” to every person and every building in town—remember. Remember how the Samaritan woman drops everything to return to her village to proclaim, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

You better believe he is.

You also better believe the Samaritan woman was redeemed and transformed by this Messiah. And you better believe one more time still that the stories of our lives can be redeemed and transformed by this Messiah, too.