

A few weeks ago you may remember I talked with the children about the Samaritan woman at the well and how Jesus saw her, really saw who she is. What I didn't know at that time was how this woman would take up residence inside my head. Questions began to come: How did she end up in this awful place in life? Was her father abusive? Did her mother live a similar life to hers? Was she raised by multiple men? Or perhaps she came from a good family, but made one bad decision that spiraled into many more bad decisions?

And, I felt a sadness for her, for how lonely and isolated she must have felt. She went to the well at noon. The other women always went in the early morning. Never at the height of the sun. Yet this woman went then to avoid having to interact with the other women. Loneliness. Guilt. Maybe some self-loathing mixed in as well.

Her life changed the day she encountered Jesus. Jesus told her everything about her. He didn't tell it to her to shame her or to make herself feel bad about herself, but to show her that he was the Messiah; the one who could not only bring new life, but give a fountain of living water to nourish her soul. He was showing her that he was the one to be worshipped and that through him all things were possible.

What happened next was not only did she become a believer, but she left her water jug and ran into the town and told everyone what Jesus had said to her. This woman who was shunned by her peers became the first evangelist we read about in the Bible. The disciples were still learning, but this woman's full embrace of Jesus and of who he was led her to want to share the Good News immediately with others. She wasn't thinking about what they might think of her, whether they would question her sanity or reject her. She was just so excited and joyous that it couldn't be

contained and she had to share what she had just experienced with others.

I can't imagine what she said or how she said it, but it had to be so dynamic and moving that the people in the town believed her and went themselves to Jesus. They listened to him and invited him to stay and he stayed for two days.

Jesus not only brought restoration to this woman's soul and mind, but he restored her to her community through this encounter. She was no longer seen in the same way as before; and she no longer carried that burden of shame.

We aren't told what happened after this encounter. As we know, our circumstances don't magically change after we've encountered the Christ. She probably still returned to her home, which was with this man, but perhaps now she would be able to get her life change around. What Jesus gave her was hope and love and acceptance. Not only did he see her for who she was, but he gave her a vision of how she needed to see herself - as a beloved daughter of God. Isn't that glorious? Isn't that an amazing gift to be given, especially to someone as broken as she?

But I also began to think about what would have happened if Jesus hadn't stopped at the well that day. Her life would have continued as it was. She would have continued to self-loathe, to be ostracized, to go from man to man until no man wanted her. She would have been left old and alone and to die alone. It made me sad to think of what her life would have been like if Jesus hadn't gone; but he did go. He went to Samaria and was not caught up in the grievances that led the Jews and the Samaritans to despise each other.

The Great Commission is one thing the Presbyterians have always valued. During the Civil War both the Presbyterians of the North and the Presbyterians of the South felt so strongly about the need

to send missionaries abroad that each branch sent one missionary during that terrible period in our history. I believe it was the North who sent their missionary to Cameroon.

The two areas that Presbyterians have been so heavily involved in over the centuries is education and health. We have sent countless educators and medical personnel overseas and it has changed the trajectory of so many lives, just like the Samaritan woman. And entering into people's lives through a service like education or health is a good way to show how faith is lived out.

There are four stories I would like to share with you this morning about why overseas mission is important for Christians to be engaged in.

The first I heard in college. A friend's older brother had graduated from college the previous May and had decided to go backpacking around the world before starting his career. In India he waited on a crowded train platform. There was a boy with a cart selling fruit. When the train finally pulled in, the people rushed to get on and while doing so the cart got overturned and the fruit scattered.

My friend's brother saw this and decided to help the boy. He turned the cart over and then helped him gather the fruit. In helping, he missed his train, but what he received was even greater. The boy, so touched by this man helping him, asked, "Are you that man Jesus I've heard about?" Can you imagine being asked that because you are living out your faith?

The second involved my dear friend, Osama. We met in Jerusalem when I was working in Ramallah in the West Bank. I would spend my days off hanging out with him in the souvenir shop he managed for his uncle. We grew close and could talk about almost anything.

One day I walked into the shop and he began yelling at me, telling me that Christians thought they were better than everyone else; pushing Jesus down their throats while they suffered under the oppression of an occupier. He said why don't they do something that will help them? Do Christians think that shoving their bibles at them is going to do anything to change their lives for the better? He needed freedom. He needed the opportunity to go to college. He needed the opportunity to travel around without risk of harassment or worse.

That's why the Presbyterian way of sharing the gospel as we help in practical ways is so life changing. Helping people live better lives while also sharing the love of Christ with them.

The third story involves my college roommate. I lived off campus and shared an apartment with the Taiwanese woman who worked for Campus Crusade. She told me that one day someone asked her why she had come to the United States; that we didn't need missionaries from other countries coming here. She should have gone to a country that needed her. With a twinkle in her eye, she responded, "Oh, you need me!" And don't we need missionaries to come and walk alongside of us now more than ever?

We learn from the voices of others, whether they are coming to us here or we are going to them in their country. We share and give and if we learn their stories, then we grow in faith and unity as we see how they are being able to be seen and heard and given the opportunity to thrive and grow.

Likewise, as we've seen all too much lately, there is a segment of our society that is so arrogant in their beliefs and have forgotten so much of what Jesus taught about loving our neighbor and welcoming the stranger, of feeding the hungry, caring for the widow and orphan; of offering sanctuary to those in need. We need other voices to break through to those in our country who

need to hear the gospel from different perspectives and different lived experiences. To hear the gospel of love and peace anew.

We are one family in Christ. And while there is plenty of need here, we should never forget about the challenges facing our brothers and sisters in other countries. It is not either/or, it is both/and. Let us help our neighbors and still find ways to help our brothers and sisters who are in need in other countries.

And they will come from East and West, from North and South to sit at the table that our Lord, Jesus Christ has prepared. Let us in unity with our brothers and sisters everywhere come to this table to celebrate the greatest gift given for all. Amen.