

Message: "Jesus' Dietary Plan"

Scripture Lesson: John 4:5-42

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another

reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Let's see - short scripture equals long sermon, so.....long scripture equals short sermon? If only you were so lucky!

No, like most scriptures, both long passages and short passages, I have found that to the discerning eye there is never a shortage of things to lift up, emphasis, clarify, postulate, propagate, interpret, extrapolate, and otherwise share in the form of homily - but I must admit, today's scripture lesson hit me quite simply as to what Jesus is trying to get across - and it is one of the clearest messages Jesus came to the world to share.

The message is this: Our desires almost always get in the way of our needs.

I remember an experience that demonstrated this truth in a way that couldn't be missed even if we tried. It happened when our three children were around two, five, and six years old; we were a young family living on the eastern plains of Colorado. In our time there we had discovered a very family-friendly barber - "family friendly" here means willing to tackle cutting the hair of three energetic youngsters. This barber was set up in a shop that had a play area for children, children's books in the waiting area, and a wonderful assortment of toys to play with. And, lest I fail to mention the greatest quality of all - this barber had the greatest after-haircut snacks one could imagine! She had a refrigerator in her shop, and it was filled with such varieties of ice cream and popsicles and frozen treats that would tempt any child - and our children were no exception.

Well, on one fine day, we all headed to this barber shop out in the country (in Eastern Colorado, almost everything is out in the country!) to have the children's hair cut. All went well - all predicated upon the offer of an ice-cream treat if they behaved, which they did. So when all the hair was cut they each chose their ice cream of choice, and we began the drive home.

About halfway to our home, we heard our daughter say something that made our hearts freeze - she said, "Mom, I think my treat may have had peanuts in it." Our hearts froze because Emily had a severe peanut allergy, one that can place her in anaphylactic shock, where lungs close down and breathing can stop. Stifling

our alarm, we began asking Emily for the wrapper, asking her how she felt, feeling her forehead, all the while heading straight for the emergency room. When we got there, her breathing was labored and we all knew she was in danger of respiratory distress - one of my strongest memories was of her frightened look as she felt the constriction in her chest.

It all turned out alright; after a shot or two and some monitoring, her breathing returned to normal. But a mystery remained - Emily had been drilled by us to avoid peanuts at all costs; to check labels; to have us look at whatever she was going to eat if there was any uncertainty; how to use her EpiPen which we carried at all times (when we learned she may have eaten peanuts, we did have it with us, but were close to the hospital and went straight there). Looking at the wrapper, it was a Snickers ice cream bar, with pictures of peanuts on the label! We couldn't help asking her, once things had calmed down, some essential questions: "Did you know the ice cream had peanuts in it?" She sheepishly responded, "well, yes." We asked, "Didn't you realize you'd probably get very sick if you ate it?" She said, again sheepishly, "I thought I might." And then, the most important question of all - "WHY DID YOU EAT THAT ICE CREAM BAR WITH PEANUTS?" Her answer was as honest as it was innocent: "Well, it tasted really good!"

She knowingly ate something that could have killed her. Because she wanted to. She needed to stay away from peanuts, but she liked the taste of the treat. Her desire trumped her need.

Such situations make pretty obvious that there is truth here - that sometimes, what we want, like, desire, or crave is actually bad for us, perhaps even deadly; dietary allergies aside, there are a whole lot of things we like that can harm us physically, and many of those things are ingested even though we know they are bad for us, even toxic in certain amounts or over time - drugs, alcohol, smoking, junk food, caffeine, candy, avocados.....there's a lot of things we ingest that our bodies don't need.

Jesus is making this exact point towards a more important area of life - our spiritual being. Call it our emotional side or our mental faculties or our psychological persona or our rational selves - in all of these areas, there is a spiritual element that guides the physical. It is the part of each person that directs the actions of the life, which says yes or no to what the world offers, which says yes or no to what God offers - and is very prone to follow desires before needs. The woman at the well provides an excellent example in so very

many ways -- what she wanted was an easier way to acquire water to drink; what she needed was a different type of water altogether. What she wanted was a less burdensome life; what she needed was liberation from the constraints of compromised ethics; what she wanted was an easily-identified messiah; what she needed was less a comprehensible God than one who demonstrated her unconditional value and revealed a hope she could not control but could nonetheless receive. She wanted an easier, justified life she could manage; she needed a new, different life made possible only through God. She needed Jesus's dietary plan.

So do we all, for we are always subject to poor dietary offerings in our world - and I'm not talking about junk food or drugs. We are over mediated by the news, with excessive predictions of doom and gloom dished out in plates overflowing; we are barraged by ugly, divisive rhetoric filling our ears from the unending political posturing and maneuvering; we are served daily reminders of the caustic side of humanity, from road rage incidents to arguments at the grocery store check out line to a yelling voice on the phone to a middle finger raised at the slightest offense (yes, I did get one of these this past week while driving downtown; not exactly sure why.....). It's enough to make a soul bitter and sour on humanity; it's enough to move one to despair, if all there is is what we see in the world at times such as these.....

But Jesus tells us something we know through not only faith, but our actual human experience if we stop and think about it enough - that there is so much more out there and in here than what the world offers which meets the needs of our spiritual, emotional, rational, and otherwise inner selves. There's the love between family and friends which makes any bad day better; there's the hope of people joined together to support worthy causes; there's the joy of children in their innocence and unpredictable mannerisms; there's the mutual support of those who have been through the same hell and can honestly say, "I know how you feel." There's the forgiveness that goes beyond convention, the compassion that exceeds common sense, the selflessness that the arrogant will never understand, the trust that the world can never provide - these are the things that only come from a proper spiritual diet of God's grace.

I leave you with this thought expressed through the words of Jim Cymbala, pastor of the multiracial megachurch The Brooklyn Tabernacle; this comes from his book Fresh Faith: "When I was growing up, I thought the greatest Christians must be the person who walks around with shoulders thrown back because of

tremendous inner strength and power, quoting Scripture and letting everyone know he has arrived. I have since learned that the most mature believer is the one who is bent over, leaning most heavily on the Lord, and admitting his total inability to do anything without Christ. The greatest Christians are not the ones who have achieved the most but rather the ones who have received the most. God's grace, love, and mercy flow through them abundantly because they walk in total dependence." (From *Fresh Faith* by Jim Cymbala)

Now that's a healthy diet!