

Woman at the Well

There is so much in this very familiar, ancient passage that has poignant relevance to the immediate social climate in North America.

A few months ago I spoke about the fact that so many new words and terms have entered our everyday vocabulary - Covid 19, sheltering in place, social and physical distancing.

Today I want us to be conscious of words and phrases like - black lives matter, racial profiling, systemic racism, colonial presence, visible minority.

Today's passage speaks powerfully to the dreadful news that dominates our current news feeds.

The horrific and fatal abuse suffered by George Floyd has stimulated a response of epic proportions. Sadly, it is not the first.....the names of black or indigenous people who have been murdered or beaten to death by law enforcement agents is not a short one. Reactions, demonstrations, and conversations have grown hostile. Once again,

we are in the midst of chaos in response to police violence and the injustice of our system and society. I want to be clear that I do not paint our police force with a broad brush. In **every** profession, for a **variety** of reasons, individuals go off the rails, and sometimes with some terrible consequences.

Here are a few statistics to consider:

Black Canadians are 50% more likely to be taken to the police station for processing than white people

Black Canadians are 100% more likely to be held overnight than white people

The 2016 Statistics Canada report indicates that the average income of first generation black Canadians was \$37,000 while new immigrant non visible minorities earned \$50,000

Twice as many black Canadians as white people were unemployed.

Black Canadians were 6 times as likely to be a victim of hate crimes.

33% of Canadian aboriginals have no secondary education compared to 18% of the rest of Canadians

44% of Canadian aboriginals live in what is defined as poor housing, compared to 6% for the rest of Canadians

50% of Canadian youths incarcerated are aboriginal.

4 times as many aboriginal children die of unintended injury.

The youth suicide rate of aboriginal youth is 11 times the national average and is the highest in the world.

Their unemployment rate is the highest and health and dental care is the lowest by far among all Canadians.

To say that systematic, culturally saturated racism and injustice in Canada does not exist, is to bury our heads in the sand and ignore the problem. In so doing, we condone and thereby support injustice. We commit sins of omission, and sins of commission. If we are not taking steps to end any particular injustice, we are, in fact nurturing and

supporting it. Some of us have met and marched and protested on the trail of Truth and Reconciliation. Some of us have read about and studied the history of residential schools and our government's excessive, devastating irreparable damage of our aboriginal brothers and sisters.

Every day last week, protests across Canada and the United States have been held with cries of Black Lives Matter, Stop Killing Us, and Take a Knee for George. A beautiful 10 year old boy of colour went viral with his simple song called, "I Don't Want to Die." This week our friend Meghan posted a photo of herself and her daughter Inez on facebook holding a sign that read #Black Lives Matter #Families for Black Lives. Addressing injustice takes time, energy, education, sometimes money, conviction, and always courage. Some wise person once said, "Justice looks like love in public."

As disciples of Christ, you and I are called to summon up our own conviction and courage, move into uncomfortable places and

conversations, and in so doing strive to bring justice, and love and light to others. Do unto others.

Remember last week that both Jesus and John the Baptist were baptizing - one with water and one with Spirit. The Pharisees were trying to create a division between John and Jesus. So rather than undermine John's ministry in Judea, Jesus decided to leave, to go north to Galilee. This is where today's passage begins.

The part of today's scripture that I am focusing upon, has to do with what today's headlines are heralding.....facing injustice head on, overcoming cultural bias and stereotype.....combatting systematic cultural racism and prejudice, sexism, ageism. We will see Jesus doing just that, and in so doing, he makes a difference in someone's life, immediately and eternally. In the process, he provided an example for his followers and opposition alike.

Jesus summons his courage. It is not a decision he makes easily. It is a dangerous decision. But he knows there is an opportunity to be an

example for others and the snowball effect that can have. He knows there is an opportunity to show what justice can look like. He knows that doing the right thing is often difficult but essential.

Jewish travellers had developed a well used route between Galilee and Judea that completely circumnavigated the region of Samaria. Jews and Samaritans were arch enemies. They wanted nothing to do with one another. Under no circumstances would they take the most direct route from Judea to Galilee. That would take them right through the heart of Samaria! Not Jesus. He was going to go right through Samaria. Jesus' decision to go through Samaria was not only unnecessary, it was provocative and scandalous. To go through Samaria, which was a shorter route to Galilee, was a show of disregard and even contempt to some. Jews and Samaritans had avoided one another for centuries. It was part of their culture. It was in their DNA. What might happen in Samaria, once word got out that he was there? What might the disciples and even the Pharisees learn by knowing he had gone there?

So Jesus entered into where he probably should not have gone. I keep saying that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. The human part of him got tired. It was hot. He and his followers had travelled far on rough dusty roads. He sat down by a well, while the others went into the nearby town to buy some food.

Jewish people were forbidden to mingle or even speak with Samaritans and vica versa. For a Jewish man to speak to a Samaritan woman was unthinkable. That as Jewish man would drink from the same vessel as a Samaritan woman was unheard of.

Do you see what is happening here? Jesus is knocking down one barrier of prejudice after another. Going to Samaria. Drinking from her cup. Engaging her in conversation. All of this flew in the face of century old animosity. This man and woman had never met. They had no knowledge of one another. The diverse cultures from which these two came, hostile to one another, had made the rules of engagement very

clear. Jesus was ignoring them. Jesus gave this woman a new vision of a relationship with God.

In a manner filled with compassion and sensitivity and conviction, Jesus allayed the social and cultural obstacles between them by focusing on the spiritual. In so doing her life was changed forever. His disciples got to witness something they had never seen before.

The first person of colour who I ever knew was my grade 10 science teacher. I felt a bit timid of him....he looked and sounded different from everyone else I knew. I got to know him. I came to respect and admire him, and enjoy him immensely. I am thankful that he was my teacher.

My association with aboriginal people is limited to those few that I met during my 3 years in Kapuskasing, and it was completely positive. Our daughter worked on a Cree reserve as a teacher for 2 years. She now has a number of friends who are first nations people.

The first time we lived in New Zealand, we lived in a rural area. There were a number of Maori people in the community and in the church. They were wonderful and integral members of the community.

The second time we lived in New Zealand it was in a city. It was abundantly clear that the Maori people were at least second class citizens. The prejudice and cultural divide could not be ignored.

Where are you on this topic of prejudice, racism, inequality, systematic colonialism? Can you think of anything that you have intentionally, deliberately done to speak out or stand up for justice and equality for all people? Would you be comfortable with one of your children marrying someone from a different culture, or race, or faith? Have you ever noticed, perhaps much to your surprise, that you might have a bias when it comes to people of a different culture or race or faith?

James 2:16 says, "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Have you ever walked into Samaria? Are you prepared to do it again?

George Floyd was a 6’6” black man living in the United States. As a young man, he had gotten into trouble with the law. Things escalated and in 2009 he went to prison for armed aggravated assault. When he was released in 2013 he dedicated his life to helping young people avoid making some of the same mistakes he had made.

He purchased a pack of cigarettes with a \$20 bill. The teenage store clerk suspected it might be counterfeit and he called the police. They arrested him. On May 25, 2020, a police officer knelt on George Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds as Floyd called out for his mother and repeatedly yelled, “I can’t breathe”.

Jesus knew that a century old division between Jews and Samaritans was unjustified. He knew that the cultural prejudice against women was wrong. In his typical understated manner, without any show or fanfare, Jesus dared to enter into an area that he knew held significant

risk for him. He shone the light of God into one life there. He entered into a relationship there Two centuries later, we still tell His story.

May we go and do likewise.

Amen