

“Revealed Religion”

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Genesis 28:10-17

John 4:5-42

[Jesus said,]

“God is spirit, and those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth.”

John 4:24

Let us pray... O God,

May our worship of you be spiritual and true. May it be heartfelt and joyful.

May you be revealed to us just as we are known by you.

May we be affirmed just being ourselves in your presence.

Amen

A new movie about a Bible story will be in theatres at the end of the month  
and it has already sparked controversy around the world.

I have heard that this new movie about Noah – which is called...“Noah”,  
is criticized by Christians in this country for

*‘not being a sufficiently literal telling of the Bible story.’*

There’s also a new movie about Christ called “Son of God” that’s already in theatres;

And though there hasn’t been any controversy about that film –

from what I have seen of its previews, it is just kind of bland.

It is tricky to bring Bible stories to the big screen and have them work –  
and that is true for any literary work of someone’s favorite book.

For one thing, people have formed an idea about the main characters and  
other details of such books that are beloved.

So to be convincing, the moviemakers need to be faithful

to the events of the traditional story and the attributes of the characters.

Last Sunday, we heard about the Pharisee, Nicodemus, who learned from Jesus  
that we are born anew by faith in God through Christ.

This Sunday’s Gospel reading from the lectionary –

as well as those of the next two Sundays, will feature portraits of individuals  
whose lives were transformed by their encounter with Jesus Christ.

Today’s story would make a marvelous movie – if it was done right,  
especially, because it has a romantic scene.

Of course like the movies, it depends on how well the storyteller tells it.

The script is already great, though you have to do your own casting.

There are three parts to this wonderful Gospel story:

Jesus’ encounter with an unnamed Samaritan woman;

The woman’s conversation with him about religion and spirituality;

and the return of the disciples and later, of the woman herself who returns  
to bring her fellow villagers to Jesus.

Willard, p.2

The disciples had gone to a Samaritan village to get food,  
while Jesus waited for them at a well – Jacob’s Well.

A Samaritan woman shows up and when Jesus asks her for a drink,  
we learn something of the prejudices of that day which  
prevented Jews and Samaritans from eating and drinking together.

What happens next seems to be just innocent banter,  
but modern ears could read into the woman’s reply –  
or ‘pick up’ on, the possibility that the woman is making a ‘come on’.  
Jesus deflects this by asking her to – first, go and bring her husband.

She seems to get defensive at this and says she has no husband,  
to which Jesus replies she *has had* five husbands  
and that by admitting this, she speaks precisely, but not accurately  
as she is currently in a relationship.

He doesn’t condemn her.

He just gets her to face these facts about her life to accept... herself.

The Gospel doesn’t say how Jesus knew this or  
whether he had intentionally waited to speak to her,  
but the text says she had come to the well at ‘the 6<sup>th</sup> hour’ –  
that means 12:00 o’clock noon...

Church World Service sponsors a charitable event called CROP Walk –  
which is like the March of Dimes, and they have a slogan:  
“We walk, because they walk”.

CROP Walks raise money for pro-active projects in the Third World,  
like building wells, so people don’t have to walk miles and miles  
to bring home water needed daily to drink, to cook, and to clean.

In traditional cultures, this is something women are expected to do and  
they go out early in the morning so they can get back early enough in the day  
to do these chores and have some rest – maybe?

This woman went to the well at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour to avoid the other women –  
who were probably not very accepting of her.

Though they would likely not speak to her at all,  
she would have been quite aware that they had talked about her.

Jesus, however, speaks to her about the obvious – he breaks the tension with a joke,  
and does not take advantage of the situation,  
either by his status as a male in that patriarchal society  
or as a charismatic person.

That is unlike the recent case in the media, about a general in the US Army  
who used his rank to coerce subordinates into adulterous affairs.

Willard, p.3

Relationships have an emotional and spiritual dimension –  
that when disrupted, can have destructive consequences.

The popular perception of adultery focuses on sex outside of marriage,  
but the real damage is caused by disloyalty – the rupturing of trust.

Jesus was very aware of his personal power – and the power of the ‘love ethic’.

The ‘love ethic’ is unseen, but – like gravity if it is ignored, there will be a fall.  
The ‘love ethic’ is a reality, whether it is legislated or not,  
and it must pre-exist for any ceremonies or licenses to have any lasting effect.

We should *love* everyone we meet – with the love of God, that is,  
which is the active concern for others in their need  
without compromising oneself.

The difficulty arises in finding the level at which to meet for honest exchange.  
That is true for what happens whether that’s in a marketplace,  
the halls of diplomacy, or a couple’s home.

Once that trust has been established,  
then real communication can take place with mutuality and respect.

That is what happened with Jesus and this woman  
and so, she felt safe enough to share her thoughts,  
demonstrating she had given some serious consideration  
to the differences between Samaritans and Jews and  
about the promise of God’s Messiah.

Jesus recognized her woundedness as a lonely person who had been reaching out –  
though unsuccessfully in her relationships, but also that this was a person  
who was intelligent and had self-worth, seeking faith.

Jesus’ character was about empowerment to ‘strengthen a weakness’ –  
as a Muslim friend of mine says, and so he responds to her with truth and love.

Then, *Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." John 4:26*

What a moment! Can you imagine this seemingly chance encounter  
of irony and intimacy – even romance.

For a loving relationship is what God seeks with us,  
but at a level that is appropriate for the mutual dignity  
between human beings who are fragile and finite and  
the almighty, HUMAN-like God we call Christ.

The Samaritan woman says nothing more and she leaves without her water jar –  
which means she hurried away.

And where did she go? She went to her village to tell everyone –  
even the people who didn’t approve of her or didn’t like her.

She was no longer afraid of what other people thought of her, saying,

"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

John 4:29

Willard, p.4

At first the villagers responded to the woman in her enthusiasm,  
and came out to see for themselves,  
but after meeting Jesus, they knew him from their experience.  
Life is messy, but in this story of the unnamed Samaritan woman  
who brought others to learn about God's affirming love and forgiveness,  
we have an example of courageous living through Christ.

Christianity – like Judaism, is called a revealed religion  
such that God has communicated to humankind through revelations  
that cannot be easily explained or dismissed by reason alone.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/revealed+religion>

Just like this story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well,  
the story of Jacob's Ladder is also about revelation.  
As treacherous as Jacob was when he tricked his brother out of his inheritance,  
God revealed in a vision, that Jacob was still loved and would be cared for,  
and that he would be blessed with descendants  
who would serve God as a blessing to all people.

Though Biblical-themed movies may not always get it right,  
the epic of God's saving love for humankind is still unfolding.  
God is still speaking and still being revealed to each new generation coming up,  
casting any of us who answer the curtain call to play a role  
like Nicodemus or Jacob or the Samaritan woman  
to be blessed and to 'be a blessing to all people'.

Amen

*This lesson is from Genesis 28:10-17 and tells about Jacob's escape from his brother Esau's vengeance for cheating him out of his birthright. Along the way, Jacob rests and in a dream, God is revealed to Jacob...*

[10] Jacob left the town of Beersheba and started out for Haran.

[11] At sunset he stopped for the night and went to sleep, resting his head on a large rock.

[12] In a dream he saw a ladder that reached from earth to heaven, and God's angels were going up and down on it.

[13] The Lord was standing beside the ladder and said:

I am the Lord God

who was worshiped by Abraham and Isaac.

I will give to you and your family the land on which you are now sleeping.

[14] Your descendants will spread over the earth in all directions and will become as numerous as the specks of dust.

Your family will be a blessing to all people.

[15] Wherever you go, I will watch over you, then later I will bring you back to this land.

I won't leave you—I will do all I have promised.

[16] Jacob woke up suddenly and thought,

"The Lord is in this place, and I didn't even know it."

[17] Then Jacob became frightened and said,

"This is a fearsome place!

It must be the house of God and the ladder to heaven."

*Let us be guided and challenged by these words.*

John 4:5-42

[5] So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char,  
near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

[6] Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus,  
wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well.

It was about the sixth hour.

[7] There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her,  
"Give me a drink."

[8] For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

[9] The Samaritan woman said to him,

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?"

For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

[10] Jesus 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."

[11] The woman said to him,

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep;

where do you get that living water?

[12] Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well,

and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"

[13] Jesus said to her,

"Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,

[14] but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him

will never thirst;

the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water

welling up to eternal life."

[15] The woman said to him,

"Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

[16] Jesus said to her,

"Go, call your husband, and come here."

[17] The woman answered him,

"I have no husband."

Jesus said to her,

"You are right in saying, `I have no husband';

[18] for you have had five husbands,

and he whom you now have is not your husband;

this you said truly."

[19] The woman said to him,

"Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

[And she said,]

[20] Our fathers worshiped on this mountain;  
and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

[21] Jesus said to her,

"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming  
when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem  
will you worship the Father.

[22] You worship what you do not know;  
we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

[23] But the hour is coming, and now is,  
when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,  
for such the Father seeks to worship him.

[24] God is spirit, and those who worship him  
must worship in spirit and truth."

[25] The woman said to him,

"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ);  
when he comes, he will show us all things."

[26] Jesus said to her,

"I who speak to you am he."

[27] Just then his disciples came.

They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said,  
"What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

[28] So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city,  
and said to the people,

[29] "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

[30] They went out of the city and were coming to him.

[31] Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying,

"Rabbi, eat."

[32] But he said to them,

"I have food to eat of which you do not know."

[33] So the disciples said to one another,

"Has any one brought him food?"

[34] Jesus said to them,

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.

[35] Do you not say,

'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'?

I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see  
how the fields are already white for harvest.

[36] He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life,  
so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

[37] For here the saying holds true,

'One sows and another reaps.'

[38] I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored,  
and you have entered into their labor."

[39] Many Samaritans from that city believed in him  
because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."  
[40] So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them;  
and he stayed there two days.  
[41] And many more believed because of his word.  
[42] They said to the woman,  
"It is no longer because of your words that we believe,  
for we have heard for ourselves,  
and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."