

Sermon Note: Openhearted Love

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Introduction

As we continue our post-Easter series *Reckless Love*, we turn to John 4, where Jesus walks his disciples straight through Samaria, a region most Jewish travelers went out of their way to avoid. He sits down at a well, starts a conversation with a woman no one of his day would bother to speak to, and when the Samaritans invite him to stay, he stays for two days. Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, might call this a ministry of reconciliation. Bishop Tom Berlin calls this week's theme "openhearted love." His book, *Reckless Love*, continues to be our companion guide as we explore what happens when God takes us to the people and places we would never choose on our own.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4hHjMEsp2I>

In this clip from 42 (2013), Pee Wee Reese puts his arm around Jackie Robinson during a hostile game in Cincinnati.

Why This Video?

The crowd is hostile, and Reese puts his arm around Robinson where everyone can see it. The conversation between them is something the stands never hear. Robinson asks what Reese is thanking him for, and Reese points toward his family in the stands: "I need 'em to know. I need 'em to know who I am."

Video Discussion Questions

1. Reese and Robinson open the scene joking about the Civil War while the crowd is hostile around them. What do you think humor is doing for them in this moment?
2. Reese puts his arm around Robinson's shoulder in full view of the crowd and his own family. He doesn't say anything to the stands. He just does it. What is that gesture communicating to the people watching?
3. Robinson asks, "What are you thanking me for?" and Reese answers, "I got family up there from Louisville. I need 'em to know. I need 'em to know who I am." What do you hear in that? Who is this moment really about?
4. Think of a time when someone stood with you publicly and without hesitation. What did that mean to you?
5. "Ain't gonna be a next time. All we got is right here." Reese treats this moment as urgent and unrepeatable. When in your own life have you felt that kind of urgency to do the right thing before the moment passed?
6. The umpire interrupts: "You playing baseball or socializing?" The world doesn't stop for moments of moral courage. How does that pressure to just get back to normal make it harder to stand with someone?
7. Reese's last line is, "Maybe tomorrow we'll all wear 42. That way they won't tell us apart." What is he imagining? What would it take to get there?

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (NRSVue)

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John 4:4-30, 40 (NRSVue)

⁴But he had to go through Samaria. 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.

⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.

Scripture Study Questions

1. Most Jewish travelers went out of their way to avoid Samaria entirely. Jesus went straight through it. Who are the people or places in your own life that you go out of your way to avoid? Have you ever surprised yourself by engaging instead?
2. The Samaritan woman has been the subject of a lot of teaching and preaching over the centuries, and not all of it is supported by the text. Read John 4:4–30 carefully. What do you actually see in her words and actions? How does she respond to Jesus, and what does that tell you about who she is?
3. Jesus bypasses small talk and moves directly to “real and important” things with this woman: living water, worship, identity, truth. How can talking about real and important things with someone be a way of loving them? What keeps most of us in the safe territory of surface conversation?
4. The disciples come back and are “astonished” that Jesus is speaking with this woman, yet no one says a word (verse 27). How do you interpret their silence? What kept them from asking the question they were clearly thinking?
5. The Samaritans invite Jesus to stay, and he does — two full days (verse 40). That invitation likely agitated the prejudices the Samaritans held about Jews, and staying likely agitated the disciples’ assumptions about Samaritans. When have you seen one honest encounter between unlikely people open the door for others?
6. Paul writes that God “has given us the ministry of reconciliation” and that we are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). An ambassador represents someone else’s interests and priorities, not their own. What does reconciliation with God look like in practical, everyday terms? What is the connection between being reconciled to God and being reconciled to our neighbor?
7. Beyond race and gender, where in your own community is reconciliation needed? What would it look like for you to act as Christ’s ambassador in one of those areas this week?

Weekly Action

Last week’s message was titled, *Lavish Love*. As a reminder to love lavishly, write the letter **L** on a post-it note and add it next to your **B** and **E** from the first two weeks. Each week of this series we’ll add a letter to help us live out these commandments.

This week, pray for God to show you one place in your life where your heart has closed. It might be toward a person, a group, a neighborhood, an idea. Pay attention to what comes to mind and ask God to help you understand why. Then commit to one intentional change toward openness: a conversation you’ve been avoiding, a question you’ve been unwilling to ask, a place you don’t usually go. Write down (or type in a note on your phone) what you notice, what you feel. At the end of the week, share what happened with a trusted spiritual partner or family member, and ask them to pray for you as you continue.

Prayer

For too long, loving God, we have been content to accept the status quo. For too long we have accepted without question the stereotypes and prejudices others around us hold. For too long we have been afraid to examine and repent of our own bias and tolerance of injustice. Send us out agitated enough by your Spirit to take risks for righteousness and to show the world how following Jesus the Savior can draw neighbors closer to each other and to you. Amen.

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