



## St John Lutheran Church

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Text: John 4:4-26

Theme "Christ and Cultural Religion"

**The message this morning is based on the Gospel reading from John 4, the account of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain (the woman said), and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."**

**Jesus, the master evangelist, meets the Samaritan woman where she is and in the end He brings her to where she must be in order to gain salvation. When Jesus encounters the woman at the well it is because of His providence... for though it all seemed to her to be a meeting of chance... it was in reality a Divine appointment. When Jesus first meets the woman she is stuck in the mire of a national religion, one that causes her to worship the god that she does not know. Worshipping that god, she is destined for destruction, for Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, meaning He is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, and no one comes unto the Father but by Him, for there is no other name given among men by which a person may be saved.**

**As they stood by the well Jesus offered the woman "Living water," the water that would quench her thirst for life, the water that would "become in her a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." The water that Jesus offered her was, of course, His very self. As is the case though in spiritual matters, the woman first didn't understand what Jesus meant, nor did she appreciate what Jesus offered her. "I want some of that water she said, because then I won't have to come here to this well again to draw!! She saw in Jesus only a relief from her taxing work, but no relief from the burden of her sin.**

**Perhaps though she didn't sense her own sin. Though her conscience no doubt troubled her from time to time, as the conscience is known to do...perhaps she hushed the voice of her conscience by rationalizing her thoughts and actions. To awaken that conscience Jesus said, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."**

**Oops!! What to do now?? Jesus knew the story of the woman's life, all of it, the good, the bad and the ugly...all of it! As He stood there before her, knowing every thought and intention of her**

heart, He acted as the voice of conscience, one that she could not rationalize away. **What to do, what to do... when** face to face with God who knows everything?

**To deal with** Jesus' knowledge of her sin the woman interjected her national religion... **the** religion that she placed all of her hope and confidence in to deliver her from the threatening peril of her sins. **"Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet (she said). Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."** **Our fathers worshipped** on this mountain (Mt. Gerizim,, a mountain located in central Palestine, adopted by the Samaritan people as their most holy place). **In short, we** have a religion of our people, a national religion, if you will, and we believe that true and undefiled religion is to worship on this mountain. **The woman's belief's**, you see, were dictated by her ancient fathers, rather than by the revealed Word of God.

**In a similar** fashion, there is a national religion, an American cultural religion in existence today. **It is perhaps** most visibly espoused in the beliefs of television personality Oprah Winfrey. **Just as Christianity** has certain tenets that define it... **so** this American cultural religion is defined by its tenets as well. **It condemns, for** instance, any exclusive claim on truth ... **in the** American religious culture truth is truly in the eyes of the beholder. **It preaches every** kind of tolerance as an indispensable core doctrine ... **moral**, social and religious tolerance. **It finds god** in all religious expressions and forms. **It designates the** heart of all men as the abode of god ... **what** comes from the heart therefore is said to come from god himself. **In the American cultural** religion, a person worships god, **not within walls** erected by men... **but in** the wide open spaces, in the beauty of creation and **in the quiet of one's own soul. It's a personal** thing you see...**collective** worship is needed at all. **It has been** said that America is no longer **"one nation under God,"** but rather, **"one nation under many gods."** **To believe in** god is a good thing.... **and** to speak of god is permissible **as long as** that speech does not seek to define god too closely.

**Religious confusion** is the order of the day in American cultural religion. **In an effort** to believe everything, it's adherents have found themselves believing nothing. **As I talked to** a woman on the phone the other day, she said she and her husband were having some marital problems ...**difficulty** dealing with conflict in their lives, the usual stuff of marital conflict. **She said her** husband was not Christian and she is a Christian... **but, she** said, we both believe in god, we both pray to god. **This is a** fairly common circumstance in our current society.

**Like the woman** at the well, who clung to her national religion, many people today cling to this American cultural religion hoping to find peace in their lives and hoping to find salvation for their souls. **And even those** of us who do not subscribe to this American cultural religion are none the less influenced by it's teachings. **We are taught** to shy away from making any exclusive claim to truth. **If we do** profess the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **to be the only True God,** thereby calling all other gods false gods... **we are labeled** unloving, and intolerant. **And being so** labeled is something we don't like much...**it is** a pressure that may cause us to give in just a little here and a little more over there. **It may be** enough to cause us NOT to confess our faith as we know that we should!!

**Beware, my friends**, of following the religion of the time, the American cultural religion, for to do so is to be left thirsting for Living Water. **Those who would** call us narrow and unloving for proclaiming the Truth don't have a problem with us...**they** have a problem with God... **for** it is His declaration...**His** Doctrine and His Will that the only way to Heaven is through the person and work of Jesus Christ!! **It has been** so since the foundation of time and those who decry this will someday see what we have been trying to tell them...**Jesus Christ** is the ONLY LORD! **Cultural religion or peer pressure...it matters not...the Truth** is the Truth and that is found only in Jesus Christ.

**Jesus, the master** evangelist, called the woman at the well out of the mire of her religious confusion by pointing her to the God that she did not know... **to the Living Water**, that, if a person drink, will **"become a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."** **In short, Jesus** offered Himself and His Grace to the woman, much in the same way that He offered the free gift of His Grace elsewhere in Scripture. **To Nicodemus, the Pharisee**, He said, **"unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."** **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life....he that believes is not condemned...but he that does not believe is condemned already"** **To the huddled masses** in the cities He said, **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."** **And finally, even to the little children, or should I say, especially to the little children, He said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."**

**So it is too** that Jesus calls us today to turn from that which we do not know... **in this context**, the American cultural religion, and to worship that **which we do know... namely** He who is revealed in the Holy Scriptures... **He** who is given in the bread and wine of Holy Communion... **and** He who is poured out for the regeneration of the erring and lost soul in the water's of Holy Baptism. Pause

**There was a powerful witness** of a young girl at a recent international gathering in New York. **A young American** asked a cultured and intelligent young woman from Burma about the religion of her country. **She said that** most of her people were Buddhists. **The young man** said rather casually, **"Oh, well, I don't suppose that matters much. All religions are about the same anyway."** She looked directly at him and said, **"If you had lived in my country, you would not say that. I have seen what centuries of superstition, fear, and indifference to social problems have done to my people. We need the truth of Christianity. When I became a Christian, it cost me something. I suffered loss of friends, income, and social standing. If your religion had cost you more, it might mean more to you too. My country needs Christ."**

**A nation's, or person's** thirst for significance and meaning can only be quenched in Jesus Christ. **All other gods** offer but hollow hope and empty promises. **"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again (Jesus said), but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."** In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.... Amen.

Lent 2A, 2008

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen

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