

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



March 12, 2023

HARVEST

and timely engagement

by Drew Downs

When Jesus speaks to his disciples about the harvest, he is really offering a useful image about timing.

And yet, as images go, it is a bit mixed. Harvests are something people do to plants. So, it is, at heart, an act of consumption. The plant is bearing fruit and we swoop in and take it. Then eat it or sell it. This can feel deeply dehumanizing or controlling when we think about these plants as people.

Of course, Jesus isn't using 1-to-1 analogies. He's talking about timeliness. And, I think, more importantly, generosity.

What Jesus describes is opportunity, what God has already produced, and *all we have to do* is jump at it. Usually, it seems our focus is on the work of creating the opportunity. Or in theologizing on how God creates these opportunities. But more often than not, our work is simply being prepared to show up.

LENT

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Discipline

In Lent, we like to talk about what we're "giving up" and "taking on". This is an articulation of a practice we're called to for the duration of the season: self-discipline. So we show enough *discipline* to refrain from eating sweets, for example.

It is quite easy to see why we might prefer the phrase "giving something up" to self-discipline. So many people use "discipline" a synonym for punishment, many can't imagine anything good coming from it. There's even a strain of Lenten practice that marries the two, making Lenten self-discipline into a kind of personal torture.

Discipline's bad rap costs us dearly. Because the season is about being intentional, reflective, and thoughtful. It is about restraint, and doing things we might rather not have to.

Like deny ourselves what we want. Which obviously includes sweets. But also other things that produce dopamine. Like buying stuff we don't need and getting angry with someone online.

Self-discipline is not only measured in what is given up or taken on: rendering our self-awareness only in the form of habits, but how we treat ourselves and our neighbors. And in our willingness to show mercy and forgive.

With love,
Drew

LENT

2023

FOR SUNDAY

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 12, 2023

Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 4:5-42 (excerpt from it below)

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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." The 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."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

LENT

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Reflection

This story, often called "The woman at the well", is beloved for its tenderness and for its boundary-breaking. It has compassion and it has evangelism. Christians of all kinds find it inspiring and motivating.

There are many things that are striking about it, but perhaps one that really gets our attention is in the section above. Jesus encourages the woman to tell her husband, fully knowing she isn't married, that she's been married many times, and appears to be "with" someone to whom she isn't married.

It's striking for a lot of reasons. It feels invasive and personal. This is stuff that would be shocking for anyone to know. But really, the most lurid part for us is that we think we're supposed to despise her. That this is, in some way, humiliating. I don't think so. And it is telling how quickly *our* minds turn to judgment.

Matters of sex have always been something leaders attempt to control. But it also doesn't define this woman. And, more to the point, Jesus first breaks the social boundaries by being alone with her. Because what matters *more* to the Kin-dom than taboos is compassion and understanding.

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