

What I Want To Be When I Grow Up: "Go-To"

Reconnect – January 18, 2009

Text: John 4:1-10; Romans 5:6-8

Key Thought: With God's help we can see worth and potential in every person, and act accordingly.

Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is baptizing and making more disciples than John" (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them -his disciples did). So he left Judea to return to Galilee. He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "you are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." (John 4:1-10, NLT)

Intro: New Year's Resolutions You Can Keep

- We've been talking about personal growth and resolutions for the last few weeks now - and this week I came across a list that might be helpful for many of us, called "New Year's Resolutions You Can Keep"

NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS YOU CAN KEEP

Are you sick of making the same resolutions year after year that you never keep? Why not promise to do something you can ACTUALLY accomplish? Here are some resolutions that you can use as a starting point:

- ~ Gain weight. At least 30 pounds.
- ~ Stop exercising. Waste of time.
- ~ Read less. Makes you think.
- ~ Watch more TV. I've been missing some good stuff.
- ~ Procrastinate more. Starting tomorrow.
- ~ Spend more time at work, surfing the web.
- ~ Take a vacation to someplace important, like to see the world's largest ball of twine.
- ~ Don't jump off a cliff just because everyone else did.
- ~ Focus on the faults of others.
- ~ Stop bringing lunch from home--eat out more.
- ~ Don't have eight children at once.
- ~ Get in a whole NEW rut!
- ~ Start being superstitious.
- ~ Only wear jeans that are 2 sizes too small
- ~ Create loose ends.
- ~ Get more toys.
- ~ Get further in debt.
- ~ Don't believe politicians.
- ~ Don't swim with piranhas or sharks.
- ~ Spread out priorities beyond the ability to keep track of them.
- ~ Wait for opportunity to knock
- ~ Break at least one traffic law.
- ~ Never make New Year's resolutions again.

Resolutions and conclusions

- We make resolutions at the beginning of a new year, but it can be at any point in time that we come to conclusions about our lives - who we are, what we're doing, whether this is what we want or not, that sort of thing
- Conclusions, as we all remember from the days that we had to write essays for school, are things that come at the end of something - a long and sometimes winding road
- And at some point on that road, suddenly something becomes apparent, and everything changes
- This morning's topic is like that for me - it's something that God had to make apparent to me over a long period of time, by repetition, some hardship, some poor choices of mine and some consequences
- I needed Him to open my eyes
- And just like when your kids rush into your room and jump on your bed and wake you up in the morning, that can sometimes be a shock to the system

Jesus shocks the system: John 4 (a closer look)

- Jesus would do the same thing during his time on earth to his closest followers and friends - the twelve disciples, or close followers/students of Jesus
- He would create a situation so that they would receive an education - an eye-opening - by the end of it
- And the section that was read earlier this morning is exactly one of those times - Jesus does something provocative, something way out there, to make an important point about life and generally, about God and people
- I'd like to read it again and take a closer look at it this morning, because over time and through the way that culture has shifted between Jesus' time and ours, some of its impact, its radicalness, has been lost:

Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is baptizing and making more disciples than John" (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them - his disciples did). So he left Judea to return to Galilee.

- Jesus' popularity is on the uptick - he's in the central section of Israel, near the capital of Jerusalem, where the power-brokers are
- But instead of trying to capitalize on that popularity, instead of trying to use the momentum he has to drive forward with a campaign or a people movement, he does the opposite - he goes home
- Galilee, in the north - back to the boonies, back to the rural area that he had grown up in - what's he doing???

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime.

- "had to go through Samaria" - geographically, yes, following a straight line would take him through the region of Samaria - but there was more to it than that
- Samaria was not a place where a Jewish person went unless they absolutely had to - there was a longer way around if you wanted to be sure to be safe, to be untainted by contact with these people
- At this time in history, both peoples were under Roman rule - but their history went way back - first to when Israel had been two powerful kingdoms, north and south, with Samaria in the north as the idol-worshipping, wayward Israel
- And then they're conquered and dispossessed by the Assyrians, who would resettle the area with others from all over the Ancient Near East
- Over time, a sort of parallel, mirror society sprang up - a Bizarro Israel - it kind of looked like it - similar faith, similar customs - but different, and the two groups came to loathe each other
- No matter what one side did, it would be misinterpreted by the other as a threat, as a snub, as an attack on traditions or values - and on it went for more than 500 years - disputing land, history, interpretations, even the worship of God
- Much of the Samaria of Jesus' time is the West Bank of modern Israel, and we've all seen this past month the struggles and tragedy of the region
- So Jesus "has" to go through the West Bank - but he's not in a hurry - he has a different agenda, that's all, on his way home - though it probably raised the eyebrows of some of his followers - "what are people going to think if this gets out?"
- It's why when Jesus told his famous story about the "Good Samaritan", that his hearers would have been shocked and scandalized at his choice of hero
- And so he's been on the road with his friends for hours, and he's tired, looking for a break - and he finds it at the edge of the small village of Sychar, at the village well, with the hot sun directly overhead

Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans.

- A woman comes into view, quickly and quietly coming to draw water - the well is deserted - no-one draws water at the hottest part of the day, because they have to carry it home in a jar on their head in the heat - no-one, that is, except someone who is an outsider - an outcast
- This woman was beautiful once, but life and the years have not been kind, and now she looks worn and tired - world-weary, drawing water, alone
- She's there to get water and leave, and avoids making any eye contact with this stranger, who is by his clothing and appearance Jewish - what's he doing there? Is he crazy? He must be, in this heat, just to be sitting here by himself, vulnerable to anyone
- But then a question breaks the stillness: "Please give me a drink"

She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

- Jesus is breaking all kinds of cultural taboos here - good men don't speak to women alone, and vice versa, and then there's the whole Jewish/Samaritan angle
- And she basically says, "What are you THINKING?"
- Later in the story, we find out that this woman is the village... well, she's gotten around - five husbands, and the man she's with now won't even marry her - that's why she's alone - because she's cut a path of destruction through this village - she's the Edie of Wisteria Lane, and they can't stand her
- But Jesus knows all that already, too - He's Jesus - and He cares about her - He sees through her history, and her choices, and her treatment of others, and her treatment by others, and her race and her customs and even what's done and not done, and he cuts through all of it as irrelevant
- "If you knew how much God loved you, you would reach out to Him"

"Go-To" people: A choice to make

- This morning our theme is "Go-To"
- There is a large part of me that wants to be a "Go-To" guy - the type that people come to when they need to get things done - the popular one, the capable one, with answers, with resources, with abilities and skills and really good hair - maybe a bit like George Clooney in "Michael Clayton"
- The sort of person that everyone wants to be their friend, just wants to have some time with them, is happy with anything they can get from them - even if they don't feel that they're in that person's league
- And at one point in my life, I was well on my way to being there
- After being fashion challenged for a good part of my life, when I was about 16 a friend of mine remade me in his image - contact lenses, stylin' hair (flat top mullet, natch), good clothes - and it helped that I had lost my 12 year old chubbiness
- At that point, I joined an insider group of church teens - the in crowd, compared to the others in that circle, anyway - and started to become, frankly, more and more of a jerk
- For the first time, I was popular, in demand, liked - and it went straight to my head
- I started picking and choosing who I was going to be nice to, and when, and adjusting the crowd I was with at any given time - dropping friends for other people that I would rather be friends with, and leaving some good people behind who had been my friends before
- I had gained on the outside, but lost so much of my inside - and that would continue, ironically, as I went off to Bible College
- I discovered a hidden skill - I was really good at making fun of people behind their backs - and at times, to their faces - we would saddle people with nicknames that were demeaning, write people off with labels like geeks and losers, and go through groups of people like we were swinging on vines, always trying to be part of a cooler crowd
- I thought that I was untouchable, and that nothing was out of my reach - that I could be or have anything I wanted

- And then the bottom dropped out - I got kicked out of Bible College, and suddenly, my crowd didn't want anything to do with me anymore - four months without a phone call from any of my "group of friends" - nothing
- From that time, over time, God has shown me, shockingly at times, that people matter for who they are - over and over again, I find myself in situations over my careers where I'm forced to meet new people, rely on them, listen to them, people that others have passed over, that are decidedly uncool - situations where there are no cool people, or there are, and I'm definitely not one of them - and that is still at times a shock to my egotistical system
- And now I realize, looking back, that God has been trying to teach me all this time that people look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart, like the Bible says - and the sort of "go-to" person that I need to be is a person who "goes to" others, in humility, looking to learn from them, looking to serve them, looking to get to know them, regardless of their appearance or past or anything else

Jesus: "Goes-To" those who need him most

- Jesus leaves the popularity temptation behind, because he knows what that can do to a person - he's grown up in a small town, he's a blue-collar guy, true to his family and friends, responsible - and the big-city folks want to turn him into a celebrity, and that's not the way it's going to be
- Instead, he goes to the least-likely lady in the least likely place, and asks her for a drink of water - puts himself in her power by making a request of her - because he sees past the label her village has for her, sees what she can be, the force for good that she can be - and he's right - she becomes instrumental in going into her village and not taking no for an answer, until they all come out into the heat of the day and see this guy for themselves and find out the love and power of God
- His friends don't get it - they come back and think that he's lost it -in fact, they're so shocked they're speechless - but Jesus is trying to show them that every person has worth, everyone matters - even enemies, even the misunderstood, even those that we don't have time for, or that annoy us, or that we don't even LIKE
- And because they do, the response is to be a giver, not a taker - after all, the cool people take, they don't give - the people around them who want to be cool do the giving, and ultimately it's a giant pyramid scheme, as those people working their way up the ladder give and receive favours to try to make it to the top

Givers, not takers:

- Someone who can give - and not just to get - doesn't need to be cool any more - in fact, they're post-cool - it doesn't matter what their image is, or if they're received or rejected - they know who they are and what matters more than themselves - God and others
- Henri Nouwen was a priest who went from being a Harvard scholar to a pastor of a community of mentally challenged people in Toronto - and he wrote a book of reflections on his life as inspired by seeing Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son - and as he learns about this transformation in his own life, he writes this:

Once we are in God's house as sons and daughters of his household, we can be like him, love like him, be good like him, care like him... That is the core message of the Gospel. The way human beings are called to love one another is God's way. We are called to love one another with the same selfless outgoing love that we see in Rembrandt's depiction of the father. The compassion with which we are to love cannot be based upon a competitive life-style. It has to be this absolute compassion in which no trace of competition can be found. It has to be this radical love of enemy. If we are not only to be received by God, but also to receive as God, we must become like the heavenly Father and see the world through his eyes. (125-126)

Nouwen, Henri J.M. The Return of the Prodigal Son. Doubleday, New York, NY, 1992.

- Jesus understood that - and He would model it for us again and again - drunks and hookers, the sick and the weak, the poor and the helpless - they were the ones he sought out, the ones he would reveal his greatness to - this woman at the well is the only one in the book of John to whom He explicitly says, yes, I am the Messiah, the one sent from God to save the world - she's the only one

Key Thought:

With God's help we can see worth and potential in every person, and act accordingly.

"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

(Romans 5:6-8, NLT)

- Jesus was a "go-to" person - he took us the way we were, just like the very first song we played

Conclusion: Schindler's List

- One of the "shock moments" that God used to gradually direct my attention back to the worth of people was in early 1994, when back at Bible College, I went to see a movie (we were, for a brief time, allowed to do that)
- It was a movie about a greedy businessman, always looking to make a buck, who in the face of enormous suffering, gradually changed his perspective and began to care about people more than things, to the point where he would give away his entire fortune to try to save lives, not exploit them
- The movie was Schindler's List, and it was the story of how Oskar Schindler managed to save the lives of over a thousand Jews in Nazi Germany by bribing government officials and paying them off to look the other way as millions were being exterminated all around him - here's a clip
- **[play the clip]**
- I cried that night - for the first time in a very long time - because God was using that movie to wake me up to the people all around me - not in such drastic circumstances, but every bit as human, as worthwhile, as valuable

- The pace of life leaves us desensitized and in a hurry - which if we're not careful, can mean that we slip into the way our culture, our times seem to value stuff more than people, and that we can start to use people as means to an end, instead of seeing them as friends, companions, teachers, they become stepping stones or levers to pull
- But they - we - are so much more than that

Response: prayer