

Midweek Heat

John 4:22-24

March 3, 2009 7pm

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In John chapter 4, Jesus encounters a woman from Samaria; of course He's in Samaria so that shouldn't surprise Him. They get into this conversation and He says something interesting. He says, "You worship which 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 is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Now when He says this to a Samaritan, it's going to carry a certain weight to it. The Samaritan had a belief or way of following God that was kind of like what you have in the Torah and the Prophets, the Old Testament, but not quite. So Jesus was saying we have some kind of disagreements here, you don't quite grasp how following God is supposed to look because frankly you're reading a different bible. But then He says it doesn't matter as much anymore because the time is coming, or in this case it is here, that worship, and following God is going to be completely different; it is in spirit and in truth. So then the obvious question is, 'what does that mean?' And not just because I'm trying to be a good Lutheran, it's suppose to be one of those things that is a little bit hard to figure out at first.

John, which is the gospel we're reading, has actually already answered that question; he did it two chapters earlier in chapter 2. By (I guess) providence; it was mentioned in the reading for tonight that Mike read. When Jesus clears the temple, He takes a whip and gets the animals out of there, He gets the people who are exchanging the money, and He basically shuts down the temple. Now the reason why this is important is because during that period of the year people were coming from all over the area, some long distances to make sacrifices to atone for sin. This was laid out in the Old Testament. There were all kinds of rules and patterns that they had to follow. But it all came down to the fact that they were there to make sacrifices for their sin for that year.

So Jesus comes in, He makes it so that they can't exchange money, which I think is kind of funny because everyone would have had these coins which would have had a picture of Caesar on it; saying 'The Divine Caesar - High Priest;' would be kind of awkward to use in the temple. So they had a way to exchange that. And then because they were traveling from such far distances, they were given the opportunity to buy animals there, because I think taking a sheep 70 miles, the distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem, would be kind of a long trip. But now they can't, so then the question after Jesus clears the temple is, how do the people atone for their sin? And then when the leaders immediately ask Him after He clears the temple, they say, "prove to us that you have the authority to do this," because this would have been wildly offensive. And His

statement is, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.” In other words, *I* am the temple. So the question of how do we atone for our sins is answered because Jesus replaces that. And now the patterns of following God, following God in spirit and in truth, is done through Jesus because He replaces these complex built up systems in ways that were suppose to follow God.

Now we’ve been talking about heat and water, and specifically when you apply heat to water to the point where you get to 212 degrees, you get steam. And when you get steam you can do all kinds of interesting things, like move giant trains and so on and so forth. Power cities; that kind of thing. So the question is, ‘what does it mean, or how does it look to pattern our lives in a way that we stay connected with God and stay aware of God’s presence in our lives in spirit and in truth? Before Jesus there were prescribed patterns, there were things to pray in the morning, and in the evening there were pieces of God’s commandments on the doorposts, and they had things that they would wear that all had tremendous symbolism. But when Jesus comes they don’t really do that anymore.

So what we’re talking about today is midweek heat. In other words patterning our week in a way that we maintain spiritual focus, spiritual energy maintains the heat to keep water boiling. There’s something about that middle of the week that makes it kind of hard I think. If you’ve got nothing to kind of push you, it makes it kind of hard to keep going.

When I was 22, most of us know that I was diagnosed with leukemia. That wasn’t the only diagnosis I got when I was 22. A little while later that summer, I was diagnosed with ADHD, (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.) And in case you think I’m lying, go back a couple of minutes. It was funny, I told my parents and they’re like, “well yeah, we’re not shocked.” And I ran into some friends that I knew growing up and they were like, “*well yeah.....*” It’s kind of funny, I lose focus, I forget what I’m doing, I forget where I’m going. I’m able to step over mounds of laundry and not notice because I’m not paying attention. Which means ultimately, Katie’s the real sufferer here.

It is funny, but there is however a darker side to it. It’s not uncommon for me to say I have some research I want to do for a sermon, preparation for something else, and I need to stay on task. It sometimes happens, more often than I’d like, that I’ll sit down and pull up a couple of articles to read. Half way through the first one or something like that, or through a book, it’s like hey wait, I recognize that name; why do I recognize that name? So now I’ve got to look up that name and figure out why it sounds familiar. Then it’s like, oh well that guy, that’s why he’s familiar I was actually going to read something else that he had written because I want to follow this source. Then I go and read his article which has nothing to do with what I started on, and then I’ve got sources to follow because I want to check and make sure he’s not playing smart with the words. So I start checking those sources and then I wonder how reviewers are taking the materials from this guy. So then I’ll start reading some of his reviewers; especially in the case of religion and theology and church life. Whenever you read reviewers, you’re generally going to find some people that are way on the edge of the spectrum of sanity, and I find that very interesting. So then I’ve got to start reading some more of their

reviews, and then I'll go to their site and read some more of stuff like that. By the end it's one o'clock in the morning and I'm tired and I need to go to bed, and I didn't accomplish anything. I learned a lot but I didn't accomplish anything. And it's funny once in a while, but when that happens a couple of times in a row, it gets frustrating. And when it gets frustrating it becomes toxic because I really wanted to work on this; a message, but then I didn't because it's really hard for me to focus. And then I feel guilty and I struggle with that because as much as I didn't wanted to, I got off track; I lost my way.

That's why it's really, really vital in Christian life to start off your week connecting with God and connecting with His community; with the church, say Sunday. But even then Sunday can only take you so far as Pastor Hal mentioned two weeks ago. I imagine you've all experienced this, I know I have, you come on Sunday and you hear a brilliant and inspiring life changing sermon from either Pastor Hal or I – maybe. You're inspired and say there are some ways I can really improve the way I communicate to my wife that I love her. Or it's critical that I spend more time with my kids so that they know that I'm here for them, that they know that I love them and that they're important to me.

You start out Sunday evening, let's watch America's Funniest Videos and we'll laugh for a while; it'll be fun. Then Monday hits, you've got 400 e-mails in your in box, and all but 20 of them are pointless forwards, and then you have a meeting to prepare for the next day, and some fires to put out. Then it's Thursday and you remember "I've been pulling 13, 14 hour days at work, I haven't seen my kids since Tuesday." And there's something about that middle of the week that gives us the chance to re-orient and to make sure we are on task. Lent and Advent, although they do provide for more work, I've come to really appreciate it because having a time in the middle of the week where I'm worshipping and connecting with the people of God, gives me a chance to re-focus, and to remind myself of why I'm here and what I'm doing as part of the church.

When I really have some work that I need to focus on, and sometimes it works better than others, I have a little program that runs in the background that will lock me out of my computer every 20 minutes. For two minutes I can't access anything on my computer because that gives me 120 seconds to think, *'ok, am I on task, am I really doing what I set out to start doing what I'd like to accomplish today?'* And it's the same thing. Now we obviously don't have mid-week services throughout the year, but we do offer things like life groups. Different functions and activities to connect with God's people in worship and in prayer; just hanging out. And I know that sometimes that feels like just another thing to do, but what if it wasn't just another thing to do. What if our vision for connecting during the middle of the week is to maintain that focus, and to keep the water at or close to 212 degrees? So we can keep following in this crazy, wild thing called the way of Jesus.

That's why I call it mid-week heat. That's why we do what we do here during Lent, during Advent. That's why small groups, opportunities to connect with others, other Christians. Worship and prayer can be such a powerful thing. And if you're not involved with something like that, I encourage you to consider it. Give yourself the chance and the opportunity to re-focus. And in this case, Lent, we're re-focusing on

Friday and Sunday. So as we continue through the rest of our week think about this, we celebrate Easter and Good Friday. We celebrate the crucified Christ who paid the penalty for us, and then we celebrate Sunday that not only does He rise from the dead and now He's alive, but He rises from the dead and defeats death, and we will rise again one day just as Christ did. Which means that, and I've said this before and you'll hear me say it a million times, it may feel like Friday, it may feel like you're surrounded by death; but Sunday's coming! I don't know when, I don't know what that will look like, but Sunday is coming. And when Sunday comes we have resurrection, we have redemption, and at that point things are going to be alright. Amen.