

**Seeing God, Seeing You**  
**John 4:5-42**  
**Rev. Shannon A White**  
**Wilton Presbyterian Church**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent: March 15, 2020**

We are living in an age when suspicion of others is high. Not only do we scrutinize people who are of a different culture, or who speak a different language, or who practice a different faith... but in this day and age of COVID19, people are even fearing anyone outside of their own families, wondering, perhaps if someone might be a carrier.

Now don't get me wrong... taking precautions amid the spread of this virus is essential. The urgings of the CDC and government officials to keep social distance intact and to wash your hands regularly have to be done in order to ensure the safety of all and to keep those particularly vulnerable healthy. But, as high anxiety mounts within us, as we wait at home and get frustrated that we don't have enough information, it's been too easy to blame others for the situation in which we find ourselves.

There have been reports of bias against people of Chinese descent, for example, blaming them for bringing this virus to us... as if those in the USA have never been responsible for having spread illness. It's wrong on all levels and it doesn't do anyone any good to do so.

What lessons can we learn from Jesus in this regard? Our Gospel lesson gives us a perfect example. This story is one of my favorites. Jesus was travelling through a non-Jewish area at this point. He was in Samaria. The scripture says that Jesus was thirsty and stopped at a well. There he encounters a woman and begins to have a conversation with her.

Now several things stand out: In those days, Jews and Samaritans did not intermingle. And even more so, Jewish men and foreign women definitely did not interact. Add to that, that she was a woman with a known reputation, and you have pure scandal. Now it says that the disciples had gone off to get food, so they weren't around to run interference. You can be sure, that this encounter was no accident for Jesus. He was making a point.

Jesus not only crossed the forbidden lines, of culture, faith and gender, but he engaged this woman in a theological conversation, smashing all boundaries. Not only that, but because of this woman's testimony, the scripture says, people came to faith.

That's just how Jesus operated... including and embracing all, no matter who they were, or how they were, or if they had social status, or if they had a bad reputation. Jesus showed us time and time again, that those whom society marginalizes are just as important as those who were closest to him—his followers and those whom others deemed as religious. In Jesus' eyes, all were and are equal in God's sight and all are worthy of God's love, because all are made in the image of God. More often than not, Jesus used stories and interactions with people to point out the hubris of those who claimed religious privilege.

A friend, clergy colleague and former neighbor tells a story which makes the point well.

Tim and his wife Ann moved into their home in a wooded area of Bedford Hills, NY (in Westchester County) in the fall of 1996. (I lived down the street from them from 1998-2000). Their son was just a few months old (at the time), and it seemed that they had found the place they would raise a family and make a life. Tim and Ann both loved it immediately and say they have continued to love it through these many years.

Tim says they chose Bedford Hills for its beauty and diversity. The elementary school was filled with many different kinds of kids and that seemed right to them. The world can be very segregated, but not this community. One oddity of their home was that it was located across from a Hasidic Yeshiva and community (called a Kasho). Tim says he knew nothing about Hasidism, but it seemed to fit with their ideal of diversity. One neighbor said that they were great neighbors because they never bothered you. So be it, Tim thought.

When Tim's son was a bit older, he would point to Hasidic men in their distinctive dress wherever he might see them and say, "Look, Dad, our neighbors!" "All for the good."

There was some interaction as they lived across the street. One rather irksome interaction that happened a few times was that a Hasidic man had approached Tim

at the store or shopping center and asked for a ride to the Yeshiva. He says he wasn't sure if it was a religious rule they were following or that they were stranded and just didn't want to walk. But he remembers saying to his wife, "These people are kind of pushy!" He writes, "I guess being so forward offended my midwestern sensibilities."

"That pushiness was nothing compared to the day that Mr. Ganz showed up at my door," Tim recalls. Passover was approaching and he was looking for a place for him and his family to stay that wasn't far from the Yeshiva. Tim says, "I was a bit taken aback, but I like to think that I practice hospitality, so I heard him out." "How many people in your family?" I asked. "Ten," he said. "I swallowed hard."

Coincidentally, Tim and Ann had just finished the basement and it was just a big wide-open space with a bathroom. "We could probably host them," he thought. "But I put off Mr. Ganz. I had to talk to my wife, could he come back in a day or so?" Mr. Ganz said, "Sure," but didn't come back the next day. He had asked to stay the following weekend and as he didn't show up day after day, it occurred to Tim that he was going to show up Friday with his whole brood. "I thought to myself, these people are so pushy he thinks he can stay here! And as the week went by, I became convinced that he was going to show up expecting to stay the weekend. And, sure enough there he was Friday afternoon knocking at the side door."

"I pulled open the door and blurted out, 'Mr. Ganz, you can't stay here!' "He looked at me kind of funny and said, "I know; I talked it over with the Rabbi and we decided it would be better for me and my family to stay elsewhere, but I wanted to come by and give you this challah bread that my wife made as a gift for you. You were so gracious about considering us staying here."

Tim says, "I felt more than a little foolish. I fancy myself as open and accepting, but there it was. I received his gift with humility and used it as the communion bread that Sunday at church. I prayed to learn the obvious lesson, and told the story to my congregation as we communed with our God and each other." ("Mr. Ganz", by Rev. Dr. Tim Ives)

Listen to these words from Poet Maya Angelou:

"I note the obvious differences / between each sort and type / but we are more alike, my friends / than we are unlike."

... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' – Matthew 12:30-31

These are extraordinary days...we will be pushed to our limit multiple times, I'm sure. The journey of Lent, however, offers us an opportunity to continue to peel away those aspects of ourselves which keep us from connecting to each other and to our God.

When we view our brothers and sisters with suspicion and fear, we separate ourselves from the image of God, for we encounter God in the face of our neighbor... no matter how different they are.

These days give us a chance to look inside, and to practice compassion and forgiveness for each other and ourselves.

May it be so! Alleluia! Amen~~

Announcements:

We are living in extraordinary times... and so we are having to respond in extraordinary ways.

It's an opportunity for us to practice adaptive leadership in our ministry here at WPC

Video messaging or livestreaming at least through the end of March; our session will make decisions after that; Links will be available on our website and on the WPC Facebook page.

Expect to hear from us regularly. I will be posting things during the week; deacons will be in touch with their flocks; Julie will convene youth groups and confirmation online via Zoom video conferencing and all meetings will meet on Zoom as well. We'll make sure you have the link when the time comes;

Nate will be developing and sending out family devotionals you can use at home.

It will be important to reach out to one another during this period of physical separation; call one another; reach out online; write notes... especially to those who are particularly vulnerable. Your deacons will make sure you have log in information to access the online directory.

Please let me or your deacon know if you need anything or if you have particular prayer requests you want to share either publicly or privately. My email is [Shannon.white@wiltonpresbyterian.org](mailto:Shannon.white@wiltonpresbyterian.org) or call me at the office. Know, I will be spending time each week praying for each of you by name.

We will get through this time. The question is how will we be IN it? Allow yourself to be soothed and upheld by the loving presence of the Spirit who prays for us. Romans 8:26: Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.