

## SURPRISING GOD

Romans 5: 1-11  
John 4: 5-42

Faith Community  
March 3, 2002

### Introduction

In a discussion among college students the topic turns to belief in God. One young man responds, "I don't believe in God because, frankly, the world works fine without God. We don't have a need for God anymore."

"We have a good idea how the world works - no, we don't know all about it - but we know pretty well what's going on. There is no need for a God. Like it or not, what you see is what you get."

### I

In the city of Sychar Jesus sits by a well in the hot sun. It's noon, and the sun is burning down. While he is there a woman comes to the well to draw water.

It's very unusual for a woman to draw water at this time of day because the sun is so hot. Usually people come to get water early in the day. This can even be a time for women to talk together as they are getting water. It is often work and socializing at the same time.

But this woman is alone. She's here in the heat of the sun. Is she an outcast? Does she come now because she knows the other women won't be here? Does she come at this time so she won't have to face ugly stares and rude comments?

As she is drawing water for herself, Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman is shocked. "You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?" Her surprise is because Jews didn't have anything to do with Samaritans. They looked down on them as half-breeds, as people who mixed their faith with other cultures and religions.

A Jew wouldn't ask a Samaritan for help, and would never make himself unclean by sharing water with a Samaritan. But, there's more here. Men in Jesus' time never spoke to women in public. It was unheard of.

You might have picked up this concern when later in this account the disciples returned from town. John says they "were astonished that he was speaking to a woman." Even Jesus' disciples, who knew him pretty well, were amazed that he was talking to a woman. Jesus is breaking the taboos of his religion and his society.

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman Jesus tells her things about her life that she thought no one knew. She's a virtual Elizabeth Taylor - she's had 5 husbands and now she's living with a man to whom she isn't married.

Jesus talks with this outcast woman about faith, living water, eternal life. They talk about the proper place and way to worship. Again Jesus breaks open the accepted opinions to let a whole new understanding shine in.

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman and shocks her, amazes her, opens up whole new concepts for her. And more importantly, a whole new world of hope. Her response to all this is, "He couldn't be the Messiah, could he?"

## II

Not just in what he says, but in what he does, Jesus breaks down barriers between people. He speaks to a woman; he shares a water ladle with a religious outcast; he talks with a woman whom others reject.

Any one of these actions is unheard of. Together they are clear acts of deviance, and intentional actions to tear away the categories of judgment we put up. As Jesus begins to bring in the coming Kingdom of God he demonstrates that it has to do with breaking down barriers between people.

In his actions toward those who are looked down on and condemned, he shows that we need to especially take away the barriers of judgment. The guiding principle of the LOGOS program is that we "treat everyone as a child of God." It's such a simple rule, but a difficult one to live.

From this story it appears that this attitude is what Jesus is talking about. He accepts everyone - not by their reputation, not by what others say about them - but as a child of God. He accepts everyone as a person who has real feelings, someone who cares about their relationship with God, even if their lives don't seem to show it. Jesus accepts people as they are and then draws them to himself.

## III

To me this shows again that God is rarely what we want God to be. We keep trying to form God in our own image - to create a god that we can be comfortable with.

The old saying goes that "In the beginning God created humans beings in his image, and we have been returning the favor ever since." We keep creating God in our image.

In reality God is mysterious. If we take God seriously in our lives, God is both comforting and unsettling. God shakes up the world we think we understand. As Jesus shows us sometimes he disturbs the peace.

God won't allow the comfortable prejudices we hold onto. Especially when we want to judge other people - like the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' example shows us that we are too shortsighted, too self-righteous.

The fact is people had good reason to judge this woman. She is part of a group that has watered down the faith, mixed it with other beliefs. It would be like someone today who wanted to be Christian and also hold onto some Hindu beliefs and maybe mix in a little new age religion.

Jesus says some pretty strong words about the sanctity of marriage, but here is a person who has been in and out of marriages as if they were casual relationships. But Jesus talks to her as a person of value and a child of God. He talks with her about faith, and draws her to himself. Jesus said to us, "Judge not that you be not judged." Here he gives us an example of what he means.

Through Jesus we see how limited our sight is. We see how little we know of God's will. How little we understand of God's world.

## **Conclusion**

There lived a man whom you would have to consider a failure. He was forced to declare bankruptcy. His marriage was, to say the least, a difficult one. He started a small law practice that never went very far.

He tried running for office and lost most of those elections. Many of his close friends turned against him. If you were to look at his resume, you wouldn't hire him on a bet.

That man was, of course, Abraham Lincoln. His life had plenty of failures in it. But God saw more in his life than the people around him did. And Lincoln saw God in his life. And that made all the difference.

We think we know the world, and how it works. But we have hardly seen the tip of the iceberg. God is doing more than we can imagine. God is working through lives we don't think worth the time. Where we judge people, God often sees great potential.

Amen