

Risk Peace
 July 26, 2020
 John 4 and Galatians 5:22-23
 Farmville Baptist Church
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Peace ó we hear that word around church a lot don't we? It is often part of the benediction ó "May the peace of Christ be with you," we say. Of course it's part of the fruit of the spirit, and we find it in lots of places in Scripture.

In the Old Testament the word for peace is most often Shalom. In this part of Scripture ó peace has two main meanings. When used in a communal sense, it most often refers to lack of conflict among Israel and other nations and the sense of prosperity that usually accompanies times of peace.

In a personal sense, peace or shalom refers to well-being with both God and humanity. In Jewish culture, Shalom is used much like "Aloha" is in Hawaii. In greeting it means "Is it well with you?" or "Do you have peace?" In parting it is given as a blessing ó Shalom ó peace to you.

In the NT, the Greek word is Irene, and it means much the same thing. In this testament, there is emphasis on Jesus, the Prince of Peace and the peace that we have as a result of His coming. So today, we are going to talk about both personal and communal peace.

The New Testament story we heard earlier ó the woman at the well - is a familiar one ó one of a woman who finds peace in an unexpected place and from an unexpected person. When the story opens, Jesus is returning from Judea back to Galilee ó which required him to either take a long detour around Samaria or to pass through this area that Jews normally avoided. You may remember the set up here.

-Early in its history, all of Israel was united under the rule of Kings Saul, David and Solomon. After that, the nation divided into 2 kingdoms ó Israel in the north and Judah in the South. At that point, Jews in the north did not have access to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. They designated their own worship space in the north and began to intermarry with the indigenous population. The descendants of these marriages are known as the Samaritans, and the pure blooded Jews in the south despised them ó to the point that they would walk around Samaria rather than risk contact with a Samaritan.

On this day however, Jesus decides to walk through Samaria, and he stops to rest around noon at Jacob's well. While he is there, a woman comes to draw water. (pause) For years scholars have painted this woman ó who remains unnamed ó in a pretty negative light. They have made a big deal about her showing up in the middle of the day alone. They often say, correctly, that women come to the well in the morning and evening when it was cooler, and that this is a communal event ó a time for women to visit and share the latest news. Scholars often conclude that because the woman comes alone in the heat of the day, that she must be an outcast ó not welcome among the other women. Although this is possible, she may have just run out of water, and needed more.

The assumption that she is an outcast is often reinforced by her conversation with Jesus in versus 16-17. Without being told, Jesus knows that she has been married 5 times and that she is currently living with a man who is not her husband. Surely if she has been married that many times, some scholars assert, there are some serious issues there. Again, that's possible, but only an assumption on our part. Life expectancy was low in the Ancient Near East, and then there was the whole process of Levirate marriage. If you were a woman married to the oldest male in a family, and he died, the next brother in line would redeem you by marrying you himself. If he

died, that responsibility would fall to the next brother and so on. If there were no direct family members left, a more distant relative might take you in, but not marry you. If this were her scenario ó her marital history could be totally legitimate, and incredibly tragic. Honestly, we just don't know. But she doesn't automatically deserve the poor reputation she has suffered for centuries.

Whatever her life story, it is clear from the very beginning of the conversation, that this woman is smart and fairly well-educated. When Jesus asks her for a drink, she knows that it is unusual ó her people don't share things with his people. But she is willing to risk interaction with him. Then Jesus tells her that if she knew who she was talking to, **she** would ask **him** for living water.

She is clearly intrigued. With respect she says, "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep, where do you get that living water?" Then we see her knowledge of her history and tradition when she asks him, "Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well?" Clearly she knows about Jacob ó she probably knows that he came to a well similar to this one looking for a wife, as did many of her ancestors. Did she wonder if Jesus was on a similar quest? Was his request for water a pick up line ó "Would you like to have a drink with me?" It's not outside the realm of possibility for her to wonder ó and since she is alone ó it could have made her cautious. But she is willing to take a risk and continue the conversation ó and so is Jesus.

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again," Jesus says, "but those who drink of the water that I will give to them will never be thirsty." In other words, they will have a permanent well-being, a lasting peace. He continued, "The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

“Sir, give me this water,” the woman replies, “so that I will never be thirsty.”

This is the point in the story where Jesus tells her to go and get her husband. Then the conversation becomes deeply theological. The woman says, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you say that the place where people must worship is Jerusalem.”

Jesus replies, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵

She says to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ The woman truly is remarkable.

Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” (PAUSE)

That day in an unexpected place ó the well at noon ó from an unexpected source ó a “chance” encounter with Jesus, the woman risks a conversation and finds peace, she finds eternal well-being in a relationship with God. (PAUSE)

It’s a beautiful story, but I’m glad that’s not the end of it. The woman models a very important truth for us in the story. What she shows us is that the pursuit of personal peace and well-being, the knowledge and understanding of the source of our salvation, is not an end in itself. She models that finding this inner peace is the beginning of sharing that peace and well-being with others. (PAUSE)

What happens next? She leaves her water jar at the well and she goes back to the city to tell everyone. She becomes the first preacher, the first evangelist in the New Testament. "Come and see," she says, and they do. The fact that folks listen to her and give credence to what she says makes me think she isn't an outcast. I doubt she would have gotten any hearing at all in that case.

The gospel of John tells us, that many Samaritans from the city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans come to him, they asked him to stay with them (hmmm ó they are not supposed to have any contact ó but they invite him into their homes); and he stays there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." (PAUSE)

Friends ó we live in a world where peace seems hard to find ó personally, locally, and globally. And the reality is we can never find true, lasting peace on our own. But thanks be to God, we know the source of real and lasting peace.

Horatio Spafford knew the source of that peace. Some of you know his story. After the great Chicago fire of 1871, Spafford, a lawyer, booked passage on a ship to England for his wife and four daughters. He planned to join them later. Tragically, the ship on which his family sailed was only half way across the Atlantic when it was rammed by a sailing vessel and cut in two. In the confusion that followed, Mrs. Spafford saw her four daughters swept to a watery grave. She was knocked unconscious by a falling mast ó when she awoke she was adrift on a piece of wreckage. Upon reaching Wales, she cabled her husband two words, "Saved alone."

Spafford booked passage on the next ship he could find, asking the captain to notify him when they reached the spot where his daughters now lay deep beneath the sea. Standing on the bow at that spot, Spafford claimed peace and wrote these words.

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
 - *Refrain:*
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
3. And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

I pray that each of us will risk opening our hearts to allow God to give us this kind of peace. And I pray that, like the woman at the well, we will share the good news of God's love and peace with others. Here is where we might get prickly this morning. When was the last time you shared the good news with someone? When was the last time you invited someone to come to the source of living water, and then invited them to come to this place to hear for themselves?

I learned something really interesting this week as I was preparing this message. Of the seven listings for peace in Webster's unabridged dictionary, six are verbs. 6/7 of the listings for peace are verbs. (PAUSE) The woman at the well knew this without the benefit of the dictionary. Once she knew that peace for herself, she got busy being about the work of spreading peace in the world ó personally and communally.

How might God be calling us to be about the work of peace? Who do you know that needs to know the peace of Christ? How can we as individuals and a community of faith be about the work of peace in our community? How can we help those dealing with all the effects of COVID 19 have greater peace? What can we do to help bring peace in the midst of the social unrest all around us? May we be listening as the Spirit prompts us, and may we all be ready to risk working for peace.