3-18/19-17 Rev. Amy Haines

John 4:5-26, 39-42 Love Beyond Boundaries Dare You to Love Series

What comes to mind when you hear the word boundaries?

a wall on the Mexican border-a fenced in backyard-

a school district border-a healthy way to say no

Many times the boundaries we create are for safety reasons for ourselves or those we care for, such as telling children not to talk to strangers or locking our church doors during preschool hours. Yet sometimes the boundaries we create are to protect our own comfort levels, to lessen our interactions with those who make us uncomfortable, or to keep us away from those we fear.

Whether you have lived in the Miami Valley all of your life or moved around the country, consider what prejudice has looked like wherever you have lived. Prejudice in Ohio may be against Michigan fans. Prejudice in Arizona may be against all Hispanics, legal citizen or illegal immigrant. Prejudice in Alabama may be against northerners. Prejudice in one borough in New York City may be against those in another borough. Prejudice in rural Payne Ohio used to never allow Catholics and Protestants to date one another, let alone marry without converting to Catholicism.

Implicit or explicit, we have all been influenced by the prejudices of those around us, and those biases often lead to the various boundaries we build into the fabric of our lives.

Even in the church, we like to say with our words that we welcome all sinners, but with our actions only often welcome those like us. What unconscious boundaries have we created in the church because of the way someone was dressed or the way they allowed their kids to act out at church or you know their past failures or you really have no desire to get to know anyone else?

Sometimes our boundaries are healthy avenues of protection. And sometimes our boundaries are implicit forms for oppression of one group upon another group.

Such was the case for the Jews and the Samaritans. At one time they had been one people, but when the Jews were forced from the land during the exile, the Samaritans stayed behind and intermarried with their oppressor. By the time of Jesus Jews and Samaritans had different temples and different ways of living.

The Jews so despised the Samaritans that most respectable Jews, when traveling from Judea to Galilee, would rather go into Gentile country and out of their way than to go through Samaria, the closest route from the south to the north. Jews believed that even contact with a Samaritan’s shadow could render them ritually unclean. These two groups had very clear boundaries separating them one from another.

In our Gospel story today, for some reason Jesus was in a hurry to head home on this trip from Judea to Galilee, and thus he and his disciples found themselves at Jacob’s well in the village of Sychar in Samaria in the heat of the noon day sun.

Jesus was tired, Jesus was thirsty, and when a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well, Jesus looked at her and said, “Give me a drink.”

That sounds like a natural request, does it not? Yet to this unnamed Samaritan woman, to the disciples who later found these two in conversation, and to the first century church who heard this conversation as Gospel story, this request was scandalous! Here Jesus crossed every boundary imaginable.

And this Samaritan woman knew it. Taken aback, she looked at Jesus and asked,

“How come, you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan, for a drink?”

She knew her place in society, and her place was not to be anywhere near Jesus, let alone in conversation with him. He was a Jew—she was a despised Samaritan. Just being near her could make Jesus unclean in the eyes of the Jewish law. He was a man—she was a woman. Women had no place in society except as defined by the men in their lives. As such, their word carried no weight. Some orthodox Jews would not even speak to their own wives or daughters in public, and shunned eye contact with other women they would encounter on a daily basis.

So Jesus was not to talk to her because she was a Samaritan, she was a woman, and as we find out later in the conversation, she was also an outcast. Most women would come to the well in the cool of morning, to gather with other women for companionship and gossip. Yet this woman comes alone, at noon, a clear indication that she was an outcast among her people.

For whatever reason this woman had five husbands and the man she was with now was not her husband.

For most respectable Jews, she was a triple outcast, to be shunned at all costs---yet Jesus is not like most respectable Jews. Jesus followed the heart of God, not the barriers of man, so he struck up a conversation with her, recorded in the Gospel of John as Jesus’ longest conversation in the Bible!

Jesus asks, “Give me a drink.”

She responds, “How come, you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan, for a drink?”

Jesus goes on to say, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

Now here, like Nicodemus last week and the conversation about being born from above, the Samaritan woman is thinking literally about the water in the well.

She says, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Notice this unnamed Samaritan woman knows her faith history.

So imagine her surprise when Jesus replies back by saying, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless, eternal life."

Endless life? Never thirst? What is he talking about?

Is he talking about a new start? Is he talking about redemption? Is he talking about forgiveness?

No matter what the woman believed Jesus was offering to her, she opened herself up to whatever new start would come her way, and she responded, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!"

Do you recognize her yearning, to fill that spiritual thirst within her? She is like so many of us who believe that all of our problems will instantly disappear when we come to faith in Jesus.

She is like so many of us who believe that life will be free of pain and sorrow if only we seek to follow Jesus. Yet new life does not mean an end to the struggles of this life. This new life, however, this living water offered by Jesus does mean we can see ourselves the way God sees us—as beloved children of God, forgiven and freed from the sins of our past, cleansed to go forth and live following the ways of God.

Next Jesus tells her, “Go call your husband and then come back.”

And she reluctantly admits, “I have no husband.”

Then Jesus states the reality of her life. “That’s nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough.”

Notice that Jesus does not condemn her or shame her because of her past or her present.

She may be an immoral woman. She may be caught up in the practice of leverite marriage, where siblings must marry their brother’s widow in order to produce children, and the last one refused. She may have been divorced by her husbands for petty reasons. We here today will never know the truth of her situation. But God knew. And Jesus is not repulsed by her but accepts her as she is.

In the early church any Jews hearing this story would have been appalled at Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, much less his invitation of living water offered to her. But that is not the way Jesus treated her, and not the way Jesus treats us. He accepts us as we are,

loves us for who we are, forgives us then calls us to be transformed into who God created us to be by his peace, his presence, his love.

Their conversation continued, a respectful dialogue about the proper place and the proper way to worship.

Then, after Jesus had offered her living water, and she had offered him the truth of her life,

finally, Jesus offered the truth of his identity. The Messiah is coming…and I am he.

I am. The name of God offered to Moses.

I am. The name of God Jesus claimed before Pilate at his trial.

I am. The Messiah. Emmanuel. God among us.

For the first time in the Gospel of John, Jesus shares with another who he really is. Jesus did not reveal his identity to the masses through his temptation. Jesus did not reveal his identity to the religious and military leaders and expect to be followed. Jesus did not first reveal his identity to those comfortable in their faith, people like you and me. Jesus did not reveal himself to the religious elite or even to his disciples; rather he reveals himself to a sinful unnamed Samaritan woman! Jesus revealed the truth of his identity to those who needed to hear it the most and those most willing to accept it—the marginalized, the least, the poor, the women without power.

To the Samaritan woman at the well he says

I am he, the one you are waiting for, the messiah.

To the women at the tomb on the day of his resurrection Jesus says

I am alive, just as I told you, go and tell my disciples.

Jesus changes lives once conversation at a time. Have you ever had your life changed by one conversation?

You meet someone from another culture and begin to talk. Even though you look different and sound different, you begin to realize that deep down, you share the same struggles to make ends meet, the same hopes for your children, the same dreams for a better world.

You meet someone from Appalachia who has few material possessions and even less money

yet they teach you the true meaning of joy- happiness in one’s family, faith and self.

You meet a person who is always giving of themselves, always upbeat in any situation, always at peace in the midst of chaos. You wonder about the light in their eyes and in conversation with them find out that the light you see that directs their life is the light of Jesus.

Have you ever been changed by one profound statement or question?

Will you marry me?

Your tests came back positive. You have cancer.

Jesus loves you. Will you love him in return?

I know the Messiah is coming—I am he.

One statement…one question…one conversation can make a difference in our lives, and in the lives of those around us.

Jesus dared to love one person at a time.

Jesus dared to love those his world considered outcast.

Jesus dared to love beyond the boundaries of his society and culture.

This conversation with an unnamed Samaritan woman illustrates once again the power of the verses we pondered last Sunday—“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (3.16-17)

This unnamed Samaritan woman is part of the world Jesus is seeking to save. Our neighbor down the street is part of the world Jesus is seeking to save. The homeless man, the wife battling the demon of addiction, even the person sitting beside you in the pew today—all are part of the world Jesus is seeking to save.

How are we following Jesus’ example and call today, to love beyond the boundaries physical and spiritual in our lives, in our church, in our world? How are we living into our baptism vow that proclaims the church is open to people of all ages, nations and races? How do we extend the love of Christ to everyone around us regardless of age, race, social class or lifestyle?

We may not feel comfortable with those unlike ourselves, but the family of God is made up of people of all ages, races, and backgrounds. Go observe that at Lakeside someday during Annual Conference. We may not agree with one another’s choices in this life, but we are still called to offer Christ to all.

Pastor Dan Metzger would caution us, however, that we cannot love beyond boundaries if we are still drawing the boundary lines between ourselves and others.

-orvseries.org/dareyou

John Newton once said, “When I get to heaven I shall see three wonders there. The ﬁrst wonder will be, to see many people there whom I did not expect to see—the second wonder will be, to miss many people whom I did expect to see; and the third and greatest wonder of all, will be to ﬁnd myself there.” --orvseries.org/dareyou

How are we following Jesus’ example and call today, to love beyond the boundaries physical and spiritual in our lives, in our church, in our world? How are we living into our baptism vow to confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and serve him as our Lord?

How do we live as disciples of Jesus in the midst of our daily lives?

The Samaritan woman shows us how to live as a disciple. She was so changed by her conversation with Jesus that she left her jar at the well to run into the city and re-engage with her community in order to tell them her story of her encounter with Jesus.

She confesses Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. She puts her whole trust in his grace, because she has experienced his grace toward her, even though he knows all about her past and present. She serves him as Lord and represents him by becoming an evangelist to the people of the nearby village, and they begin to believe at first because of her confession, and then because Jesus agreed to stay among them two days longer and they got to know him.

Like the Samaritan woman, we here today are called to love and be loved beyond the boundaries in our lives. We are called to receive the living water of grace, a willingness to be open to Christ’s own presence within us and among us. We are called to be changed by our encounter with Christ, leaving behind our past hurts, sins and fears. We are called to come and see, then go and tell, sharing our stories of how God has touched and transformed our lives, and how we seek to live as disciples of Jesus.

As you leave this hour of worship today, be open this week to God’s Holy Spirit guiding you to love beyond boundaries, both near and far, both physical and spiritual, both easy and unexpected.

Then I invite you to share with one other person next week how you followed the call of Jesus to love beyond boundaries, and how that experience changed or challenged you.

May we love others as we have been loved by God. Let us pray.