

3rd Sunday in Lent
March 23, 2014
John 4:5-42

Lent reminds us of something we tend to forget – “We are born into a world without God.” Strange – odd – but true. “We are born into a world without God.”

Now I don’t mean to say that God is not in our world, or that the world was not formed and created by God. No, not that. I mean to say that when we are born, we do not know God is in the world. We are not aware of God’s presence, the reality of God’s activity all around us. That God is in our world is not innate to us, not automatically known, not wired into our DNA.

Just so, many people live as if there is no God in this world. In a recent survey of millennials on the practice of faith – participation in church or a religious identity – 4 out of 5 millennials state they have no religious affiliation, no personal beliefs in God.

What we are born into is a world of Consumerism. We are first and foremost consumers. We look to the world around us for the resources we need to live – and live better and better.

Our culture is pitched to our consumer needs and supports our consumer mentality. What is in it for me? How can I live happier, more fulfilled? What do I need? What do I want? Products, Services, Experiences are sold to you and me in a constant, senseless bombardment through every media/communication channel. Televisions, sign posts, Internet pop-ups, cell phone ads, radio, mail, flyers, robo-calls, even in bathrooms. Everywhere, anywhere, always.

This world knows who we are and is pitched around our identity as consumers. The world centers its attention on me. I am the center of my world.

That’s how the story of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman told in John’s gospel begins.

- A Samaritan woman coming to the well for water for her household.
- A chance encounter with Jesus who is looking for a drink of water.

In their exchange, Jesus turns the conversation to the things of God. He speaks of “Living Water.”

“Everyone who drinks of this water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this (living) water so that I may never be thirsty again or have to keep coming back here to draw water.’” John 4:13-16

Consumer.

Give me the product that will make my life better, happier.

In a world without God, without God in the center, we look to fill and fulfill our needs as best we can. We fill our lives with stuff.

But then something transformational happens, something radical shifts in this encounter. And the woman who was a consumer viewing Jesus as someone who can give her a product she wants to make her life better transforms. She becomes a witness.

Suddenly, it is not about her – about her wants and needs. It’s about others – about proclaiming, sharing her new awareness of God.

“Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’ ... So the Samaritans came to Jesus...And many more believed because of his word.” John 4: 28-30, 41

She left her water jar.

Her concern for herself – what brought her to the well in the first place – disappeared.

She left her water jar and found people to tell them about Jesus. Witnessing to the reality of God in their midst, right here in our city.

What transforms consumers into witnesses? What turns people inside out? Instead of focusing on themselves, they turn their focus outwardly; to look to witness, proclaim, share, influence, impact the lives of others with the joy and grace of God in our midst.

They move from being consumers in themselves to investors in other people, other consumers, who in turn transform into investors in others and God’s word of grace and truth spreads.

What changes a person’s perspective from inward need and want to outward sharing and investment in another’s life?

The answer, in a word, is Jesus.

Between the Samaritan’s tired walk to the well carrying her water jar to her excited rush back to town to tell everyone about the Messiah is her encounter with Jesus.

In Jesus, she came to know God, to see the world around her as one created and infused with God’s presence. No longer a religious concept, a dispute among Samaritans and Jews about the proper place and way to worship. No longer a consumer of religious products. The Samaritan woman has met Jesus and no longer can contain her faith for herself.

Think of your own faith journeys. When did God become real for you – more real than simply a consumer tool – a way of meeting spiritual or social needs?

In Jesus, we are lifted above this consumer world to a vision of God beyond price, beyond cost/value analysis, beyond gift. “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:6-8

“So we boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Go forth, proclaim the good news.

Live in a world with God.