

Newlonsburg Presbyterian Church

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Seeing People the Way Jesus Does

John 4:1-26

8/23/26

What does it mean to value others? We pulled up to a back alley in Philadelphia where guys were actively doing drugs on the trunk of a brown sedan with windows mashed as we hurried into our rental house. It was graduation weekend May '25 at Villanova University when I received a Master of Science in Church Management. I thought the rental house was a bargain because it was only 25 minutes from campus and the pictures were gorgeous. The reviews didn't mention the guys outside on a Thursday at 4:30 in the afternoon. Hope and I then regrouped and started to do a little more research on how safe the streets were in this part of Philadelphia: the research said a little crime on the main street just don't go on the back streets! Hope and I started counting how many streets from the main drag...1, 2, 3, 4...5... I tell Hope, "I preach this all the time, let's meet people. Let's explore with caution." We find an ice cream shop about 8 blocks away. It was now about 6P and a beautifully pleasant May evening in Philly. As soon as we got out of the row house, a guy yells, "Hey, get your truck up on the sidewalk or you gonna get swiped." On our walk we see trash blowing, houses boarded up, *Colt 45 bottles*, the smell of marijuana in the air but also kids playing in the streets. By the time we get home it's getting dark. As we walk up our stoop, the music is blaring and the street party has begun. As it gets darker the music gets louder and the boys are curious about a Philly street party. "Ok, I'll sit on the stoop and you boys can go dance with the kids." Our family is sticking out like sore thumbs.

The Samaritan woman represents multiple social, cultural, and religious divides. Jesus intentionally moves toward someone others avoid. He neither compromises truth nor withholds compassion.

What does it mean to value others? Does it mean to keep our families safe? Is the Gospel safe?

John 4:27-42

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman teaches us what it means to value others. Especially strangers. For today's Church, this means learning to engage people with curiosity, respect, and grace rather than suspicion and hostility. We could have chosen to stay locked in that house to keep safe from Philly streets. But that is simply not the Gospel. For us to lock ourselves in our houses, lock ourselves in our emotions, lock ourselves in our national borders is not the Gospel. Jesus doesn't build walls: Jesus crosses barriers to offer grace, truth and belonging. So, the boys went out and danced, and I talked to the guys hanging out on the stoop.

Friday morning, we woke up early to drive the 12 miles for all the festivities Villanova had to offer for graduation weekend beginning with worship in their basketball arena. We drove back to our rental around 9P. We pulled up to our place, barely able to drive through the narrow alley because it was a block party! People everywhere, and we looked out of place dressed for graduation and ladies have everything showing for it was hot and the guys in street wear. The boys are like, "Let's get out there! It looks like fun! The host had a nice bottle of Scotch to offer, so I pour a little, walk outside with the bottle to celebrate with the party. As I walk up to a group of guys, (I'm the oldest guy on the street) I introduce myself and offer a drink. They say, "Nah, that stuff will kill you. We just smoke all natural. You want some?" "No, thank you." Jokingly they say, "You're not as cool as that 70-year hippie couple who was here last week."

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Jesus offers living water which is courage. Jesus' disciples warn Him to avoid Samaria because you know the kind of people who live in Samaria, don't you? Jesus moves toward people others avoid. Read John 4 this week to keep inspired by Jesus' actions. He listens before judging. He seeks understanding before disagreement. He builds relationships with people who are different from Himself. He commands us to do the same.

Jesus always sees you for you, not a category. We often see categories closing our minds instead of staying curious. Jesus' food in this story is His Faith to stay curious. His faith to see us as children of God, not categories. His food is His faith empowering us to life faithfully not fearfully.

Too often we allow fear to control our choices. We allow fear to control our policies. We allow fear to steal joy. This is not what Jesus wants for us. If we would have stayed locked in that rental, we would have stolen our own joy. By following Jesus, we experienced joy with strangers. Jesus teaches that He desire for His joy to be in us and for our joy to be complete. - John 15:11 When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we commit to practice Jesus' faith that crosses barriers to offer grace, truth and belonging. Jesus empowers us with His Holy Spirit to continue His ministry.

The night of graduation I was standing with a group of guys that were smoking the largest cigar that I have seen, but it didn't smell like a cigar! One guy asked, "Pastor, did you ever think that you would be standing in a back ally of Philly on the night of your graduation?" "No. Didn't see this coming. But I'm glad I'm here."

For the glory of God and the betterment of humanity,
Pastor Curtis

Theme: Jesus crosses barriers to offer grace, truth and belonging.

1st Scripture: John 4:1-26

2nd Scripture: John 4:27-42

Sermon Notes:

1. What does it mean to value others?
2. The Samaritan woman represented multiple social, cultural, and religious divides. Jesus intentionally moved toward someone others avoided. He neither compromised truth nor withheld compassion.
3. For today's church, this means learning to engage people with curiosity, respect, and grace rather than suspicion and hostility.
4. Listen before judging. Seek understanding before disagreement. Build relationships with people who are different from you.
5. Jesus saw a person where others saw a category.