

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

So, growing up a Lutheran in small town Illinois meant a few things in my family. First, it meant that we were at church every Sunday and other times throughout the week. I often joke that if the doors were open and lights were on – my family was there. Second, it meant that there was a certain dress code to going to church services. We always dressed up for church. We always wore our church clothes. I can remember the one time my mom let me wear jeans to church – I was so shocked that it is a moment I will never forget. And thirdly, it meant that we were often one of the first people to arrive for church and we had our own “pew” so to speak.

Many of you can probably relate to these things. Maybe you grew up like I did, but I tell you these things today to set the scene for the story I am going to share with you. It was Sunday morning. We had arrived at church at our designated time, and took our place in our pew. We smiled and waved at our church family, and quietly waited for the service to start. After a few minutes, I started to hear some whispering, and I start noticing people staring at someone. It was then that I noticed the man who had walked in – a man dressed in dirty and shabby clothes – a man who was also very dirty, more than likely homeless, and obviously didn’t know the rules. He made his way up to the front of the church and sat in the front row. So, he probably wasn’t Lutheran. The whispering and staring continued but no one greeted him. Finally, a man from the back named Gene made his way to the front, greeted the visitor, and sat with him during the worship service. After worship, Gene took the time to introduce the man to our pastor and to several other people and they worked together to get the man some help – I think witnessing all of that helped us to open our hearts and minds to someone that we had initially labeled as an outsider, a nobody.

I learned that day so clearly that the people we label as nobody are somebody to Jesus. Jesus breaks boundaries and barriers to reach all people with the gift of love and mercy. Today in our gospel reading, we witness Jesus doing just this thing – breaking down the boundaries and barriers that society puts up – reaching out to an outsider – and empowering her to invite others to come and see.

Jesus arrives in a Samaritan city and he goes to sit by the well. It is the middle of the day, and there is only one woman there. We aren't told her name. She is an outsider. She is a nobody. And it is strange that Jesus would interact with her. She is Samaritan. Jewish people and Samaritan people did not like each other. They were enemies so to speak and had been for many, many years. She was a woman. Women didn't typically interact with men they did not know – at least not to the length of the conversation that she had with Jesus. And she was more than likely an outsider in her community. She was there in the middle of the day. The middle of the day is not a normal time when people would gather at the well. Usually the women would gather early in the morning to get the water for the day. It was also more than likely a time of social interaction as well. A time where this woman was possibly not welcome. Maybe this woman was here at this time because she was being shunned by the other women or maybe she just didn't feel comfortable being around the other woman.

So, Jesus breaks down the barrier between he and this woman by asking her for some water. Jesus did not look at her as a nobody. He takes her seriously. He engages her conversation. He gives her the chance to have an encounter with him – to see the face of the Messiah in this stranger she just met. Jesus does not turn away from this woman but offers her the living water that he has to give and opens her eyes to the reality that he is the promised Messiah – that he has something that she needs – his love, mercy, and forgiveness.

The woman at the well is changed. She leaves her water jug and heads to tell the others to “Come and See” – she goes to her community who may or may not listen to her and invites them to discover what she has discovered. The woman – her community – their welfare matter to Jesus – whether they were nobodies or not – whether they were Samaritans or not – they mattered. And that was good news to them and that is certainly good news to us.

You see – Jesus breaks boundaries and barriers to reach the Samaritan woman and her community, and he does the same for us – all of us – even and maybe especially those who are considered nobodies. We matter to Jesus whether we are nobodies or not. We are all somebodies to Jesus even with all of our baggage, all of

our sin, and more. Jesus changes us – Jesus offers us his living water – his love, mercy, and forgiveness and we are forever changed.

Sometimes, though, we might feel like we are unworthy of what Jesus has for us – or we might even set up boundaries in our faith community or in our lives that leave people out – that try to say that some people are unworthy to receive Christ.

Sometimes we are told or hear things like we need to pray harder, we need to have stronger faith, we need to have all of our ducks in a row before we can be “good enough” to receive the love of Jesus. But we do not have to have it all together to receive what Jesus has to offer. We do not have to even fully understand what Jesus has to offer – it is a gift given to us out his unending love for us.

Encounters with Jesus breaks all boundaries – the boundaries that society puts up – the boundaries that we build up in our faith community – the boundaries we put up in our life. Jesus’ love breaks those boundaries – those barriers – and changes us forever. Just like the Samaritan woman we are transformed and empowered to invite others to “Come and See.” To welcome others to have encounter with the Savior of the World.

The Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus was unexpected and it changed her life. We unfortunately won’t meet Jesus face to face at a well like she did, but we have the opportunity to encounter Jesus in the people we meet, in our worship, in the word, and in our sacraments and we have the opportunity to invite others to “Come and See” and to be changed in the process.

When we were in our first year of seminary, my oldest son was 12, and he was struggling to fit in – to find that thing that he liked. He wasn’t a sports kid – he was pretty clumsy so that didn’t help. He did like music, but hadn’t found anything outside of band to participate in. One day at church, his Sunday School teacher gave him a brochure and a dvd about the local drum corps. They had a cadet level and he thought it would be a great thing for Michael. We went home and watched the video, and if you have ever seen competitive drum corps, you will know why I thought that there was no way Michael could handle this. They performed complicated programs all why playing a brass instrument and marching, and Michael tripped over his own feet at that time. So, the next week at Sunday School, we shared our concerns, and his teacher just simply

asked us to come and see. To lay aside our concerns and come and see what it was all about.

That's what we did. And it became Michael's thing. He competed on the cadet level for 5 years, and one the world class level for 1 year. It was a life-changing experience for him – he not only became an amazing musician, but gained confidence, leadership skills and more. All because someone was willing to ask us to come and see.

I tell this story because I wonder how many opportunities we have had to invite someone to come and see and we haven't. And I'm not talking about to our favorite extracurricular activities, but how many times have we passed up an opportunity to invite people to come and see what Jesus is all about? How many times have we wondered if we would offend someone or make them uncomfortable? If we learn anything from the Samaritan woman it is this – that inviting people to come and see is worth it. That we have something to share. That we can step out in faith to invite people to come and see. We have been changed by the living water that Jesus has given us – we have been empowered – we have been transformed to welcome others to receive this same amazing gift.

We were once outsiders. We were once nobodies. Jesus transformed us into insiders, somebodies, and most of all witnesses to invite others to come and see! Thanks be to God. Amen.