

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy. Amen...

During Seminary, I spent a year living in Vancouver, Washington for my pastoral internship.

And prior to my internship, my husband, Keenan, had never been outside the Midwest.

We were fortunate to set aside some time for him to come and visit me, while I was living there. And when my internship came to an end, he got a one-way plane ticket to Vancouver, so that we could drive back to Wisconsin together.

I was so excited to spend this time with Keenan, and also for him to see some of the amazing places in our country.

But since there are so many beautiful places, and so many different routes one can take, we felt completely overwhelmed on what to see and where to go.

And so, we came up with a strange route...

We decided to leave Vancouver and head south... Specifically seeking out two destinations, Crater Lake and the Redwoods.

Then after leaving the Redwoods, we headed north, traveling back where we came from for a while before veering farther north and east, heading to Glacier National Park.

A route that took us out of our way, but a route that allowed us to see many beautiful places.

A route that even Jesus understands... Well maybe not from a sight seeing point of view, but Jesus understands what it means to go out of ones way.

As our gospel reading from today is situated in a story where Jesus travels out of his way.

The verses that lead up to today's Gospel illustrate the setting. Here we are told that Jesus is leaving Judea and heading back to Galilee.

But to do so, he needs to go through Samaria, which is where we find him now, in the Samaritan city of Sychar

However, it is actually not geographically necessary to go through Samaria when traveling from Judea to Galilee.

As Karoline Lewis explains further, "In fact, a Jew would most certainly not journey through Samaria because of the risk of coming in contact with Samaritans." As the Samaritans and the Jewish people did not like each other.

But yet, Jesus says it is necessary for him to go through Samaria.

And to find out why this is, we need to flip back to the chapter just before our reading, which was our Gospel reading from last Sunday... The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

A conversation that brought Jesus to say, "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only son. So that all who believe in him will not perish, but will have eternal life."

And right after this conversation, Jesus heads to Samaria...

Showing the trip wasn't a geographical necessity. Instead, it is a theological necessity.

Because this is how God loves the world.

God loves the world through Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman.

A conversation that takes place at noon, outside, during the brightest time of the day for all to see...

And it is the longest recorded conversation that Jesus has with anyone in all of the Gospels.

But it is not just the length of the conversation that is important, but also to whom Jesus is talking...

As this person is a woman, an outsider, and someone who does not even get a name.

Embodying, in many ways, the "otherness" in the world.

As the woman at the well embodies all the people we do not know, the people we do not like, the people who have different traditions, customs, orientations, beliefs, and political views.

Yet Jesus has a conversation with her, listens to her, and offers her living water, because all people matter to God.

Which is why God's living water gushes up to eternal life... As this spring of water provides life.

A spring of water that mirrors what God did for the Israelites in the wilderness. A story that we heard about both in our reading from today, and during our Lenten service on Wednesday.

When we discussed the importance of prayers of Lament and being in an open and honest conversation with yourself and with God...

Which is like the conversation that took place in our Gospel reading today. Only this conversation isn't a Lament.

But this is still an honest conversation. A conversation that is important for Jesus to have... not only with the Samaritan woman... but with all of the people in her town.

As we discovered at the end of our reading that Jesus stays in Samaria conversing and being in relationship with all of the people there for 2 more days.

Time that was valuable for Jesus... Time that Jesus spent going out of his way and staying for 2 days, so that God's love could seep out into the world through others.

Which begs one to ask...

How is God calling you to go out of your way, for someone else?

And, how can you share God's love with the world?

Which may sound easy in theory, but to take the Gospel seriously, we know it is anything but easy.

Because to truly go out of your way for someone requires some sacrifice. At a minimum it requires time, energy, and being present. It involves dedication, honesty, and being open to God's love.

But it is worth it... Because the love you share with others could completely change their day or their world... for the better...

And when your actions are based in God's love, what will blossom in front of you, and in your midst, will be more beautiful and more wonderful than any place you could ever visit from a geographical standpoint...

Because relationships bring about life. It is relationships that give life meaning. And it is relationships that invite love into the world and to the places we travel.

Because so often our journey is what matters most, as our journey becomes the destination.

Of course, there will be glorious stop points along the way, but those are few and far between...

As the time we spend together matters, and how we spend it matters. As so much of our lives are spent in journeying together, in the world.

In a world that God so loves.

And so, this week, I invite you to bring God's love into the world for others.

Because each of you are equipped with God's love to do just that.

For God's love flows in you, and Christ's living-waters are forever a part of you.

Forever renewing, forever forgiving, forever inviting you into life anew. And forever inviting you to be God's love in the world... Amen.