

Sermon *Khesed – The Loving-Kindness We Can Share with Others*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 3.8.26

Exodus 17:1-7
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42
Psalm 95

I have a theory. If we can understand the spiritual dynamics of what was happening in the 1st century with today's Gospel lesson, we'll be able to see how it fits into our 21st century life. Let's start with the Gospel lesson. Commonly called, The Woman at the Well, Jesus asks a woman for a drink of water. The conversation that follows leads him to reveal to her that he is the Messiah (she's the first one to hear this). Upon hearing this, and after Jesus told her everything that she's ever done in her life, she leaves her water jar, goes into town, tells everyone about Jesus. They come out to see him. They believe; ask him to stay; and then he stays for two days. People who first believed because of what the woman said now believe because they have spoken with Jesus.

The interaction that started this whole event was the woman asking Jesus: *Why is that you a male from Judea, ask me, a woman of Samaria, for a drink of water?*

It's a good question – why. Why did Jesus do this. It was noon, he was tired, he sent his disciples into town. He asked the woman for a drink of water. The simple answer is that he was thirsty; but I think there is a lot more to it than that.

Let's take a look at the spiritual practice of *khesed*. It's a Hebrew word which is often translated as loving/kindness. Some call it "mercy". The concept involves all those elements – kindness, love and mercy. Mercy because it is undeserved. It's an option but not required of the circumstance. It is love because it is a gift you give someone else. Ultimately, *khesed* is kindness. Showing kindness to someone. The less deserving someone is of kindness, the more that *khesed* is shown.

Jesus offers the woman at the well "living water" so that one will never be thirsty again. It's metaphorical, but the idea is that once one receives this spiritual gift, you'll never be thirsty for something else. He asks her to call her husband. She said she has no husband. Jesus smiles (in my mind's eye) and says: You are correct, you've had five husbands and the man you are with now is not your husband.

Now it is making more sense that she is at the well, by herself, at noon. She doesn't want to talk to any other townsfolk; or she's been rejected by them. Even in our 21st century mindset, she's been through a lot of relationships and is currently with someone she's not married to (it makes one wonder if the man she's with is married to someone else).

Khesed – Jesus chose this woman to show kindness to. He revealed who he is to her. And she believed.

With *khesed* is another Hebrew phrase I'd like to introduce you to. It is *Pikuach Nefesh*. The principle is this: if, to save someone's life, you have to break a part of the Law (Torah), then you must break the law. A common scenario is this: *pikuach nefesh* means that if your neighbor breaks his leg on the sabbath (when no work is to be done) and needs immediate attention, *pikuach nefesh* means you should saddle up your horse (work), attach a cart (work), put your neighbor in your cart (work), and bring him to a doctor (work). It is more important to save a life than to uphold the Law. One could say the Law teaches us how to live but we are not to die from following it. Another example, one is not to make a graven image of God. But, if someone forces a Torah-observant person to make an image or die, well, it's pretty straightforward what to do. God is *khesed* – God knows and will be kind if a situation like this comes up.

Back to the woman at the well. Judeans do not interact with Samaritans. Rabbis do not speak, one on one, with a woman. Yet, *pikuach nefesh* says that Jesus needs to break those customary social laws and speak with her – it will save her life and save many in the town too. Jesus did this out of *khesed*. She didn't deserve it, but she received it anyway.

What did she do with the *khesed* Jesus showed her? She left her jar, went into the town, and shared what she learned with people who, most likely, had not been kind to her. She received *khesed*; she shared *khesed*. That's the living water! Being kind doesn't make you thirsty. Revenge on the other hand, well, that does not satisfy.

That's how this played out in the 1st century. How is *khesed* going to play out in your life?

On Saturday, All Angels had a booth at the LBK Open House. The first year we did it, we offered pet blessing. The second year, we added bike blessings to the pet blessing. This year, we decided to be a little crazy and offer pet blessing, bike blessing, and human blessing! We had signs up saying "Free Prayer" and the rest, but what really worked, was our volunteers asking people if they'd like a blessing. If they said yes (which was most of them), they'd send them to me. There are two interesting things I discovered – first, we blessed more humans than pets and bikes. Second, there are three distinct groups that asked for prayer: Roman Catholics, people of the Jewish faith, non-believers. In other words, I was outside of my Anglican tradition. Thanks to the VA who taught me to be a chaplain, I can pray for people with a variety of different religious backgrounds.

I asked each person if there anything in specific that I can pray for? More often than not, the request was for a family member or friend. But, one woman, when asked replied: Yes, please pray for people I can't stand; for the people I don't want to be around; I'd like you to bless them. Before I took her hands, I felt the energy (tingling) in my arms. I asked that God bless those who she doesn't like as much as God blesses her and those whom she loves. It was a living example of *khesed* – loving/kindness to people who may not deserve it.

The woman at the well is inviting us into the sacred realm of God's *khesed*. She'd be the first to tell you she didn't deserve God's loving-kindness but she received it. We are now called to follow in her footsteps and to share *khesed* with others, even those we do not like. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen