

“THE GOSPEL IN GREAT MOVIES – JOURNEYS WITH JESUS:  
IV – SAMARIA”  
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John 4:5-42

It might be hard for you to remember since we’ve had so many gloriously wonderful days this week, but last month, in July, we had a stretch of hideously hot weather. Remember that? Ugh! It was so hot, it almost took your breath away. Getting in your car after it was sitting in the sun was like walking into an oven. It was bad.

That’s the kind of day I have in my mind, when I think of the day Jesus met the woman at the well in Samaria, the story we just heard read in this morning’s Gospel lesson. A nasty, hot, hideous day. And in the Middle East, add dust to the equation. So, it’s a nasty, hot, dusty day, and when Jesus meets this woman – it’s in the very hottest part of the day – high noon.

The scripture says that Jesus was tired from his journey and was sitting by the well by himself. There appears to have been nobody else around, and that makes total sense. Nobody in their right mind goes to the city center during the most intense heat of the day. They go early in the morning, or late in the day, when at least it’s a bit cooler. That’s when you’d see the crowds.

So Jesus is sitting by the well in this empty town center, and here comes this woman, all by herself as well. Now, what brought **her** there? Well, as we read on in the lesson we find out exactly why she has come at this strange hour. She’s come so she won’t be seen by others, or, more exactly, won’t be looked down upon by others.

You see, she’s a woman with a storied life. As we read in the passage, she is single, but living with a man, and on top of that, she’s had five husbands before him! Can’t you just hear the gossip that flowed about her? Can’t you just picture the other “good” women of the town looking down at her, or walking out of their way to avoid her, or making sure their children don’t get around her?

Her’s is a lonely life, and so, as miserable as it is, she steps out into the terrible heat of midday to get her water from the well. It’s just so much easier, and so less painful. And, I would imagine, it’s become pretty routine for her. Walk to the wall in the heat, draw up her bucket of water, walk home – that’s that.

Except on this day, somebody’s there. I wonder if she thought, even for just a moment, about turning around and waiting until he left, because surely the women of the town weren’t the only ones who had ostracized her – surely the men had as

well. She could have turned around and waited in the shadows until this man got up and left.

But she didn't, and thank goodness she didn't, because her encounter with this man would change her life. In her time with Jesus, life opened up for her. She was astounded to find out that He knew all about her, but even more astounded that He cared about her in spite of her story. And He opened up to her a future more wonderful than she could possibly imagine – a future filled with hope, and assurance, and love.

It is a beautiful story, and one that tells us so much about our Lord. Jesus is always at the right place at the right time for someone who needs Him. We read in the scripture that He was tired from His journey, yet He ministered to that woman from the moment He saw her.

And those are the pivotal words – “He saw her” – He noticed her. In a world filled with people who were deliberate about **not** noticing her, Jesus saw her and spent time with her. He didn't see a woman with a sordid past, He saw a child of God, like any one of us, a sinner standing in the need of grace. He talked to her – and no, it wasn't a sugar-coated conversation – it was an honest, sometimes difficult conversation – but He cared enough about her to have it. And then, He cared even more for her by telling her about the new life that could be her's through the living water He could provide.

Jesus stopped, He saw, He stayed, and invited this woman to enjoy new life. That's what He did all the time, and my friends, as those who are His followers, that is the life to which we are called as well.

Unfortunately, we don't always find it easy to live that way, do we? I mean, we're so busy all the time, going here and going there, we barely take notice of the places we pass, let alone the people. I've talked to you before about going from one place to the next, and then realizing that I don't even remember how I got there. We're so preoccupied with what we have to do next, and or what have to get from the store, or who we need to call – that we pass through life sometimes with blinders on. Some of us might have gone to that well in Samaria that day, gotten our bucket of water, and not even realized someone else had been there too.

And sadly, we too, like the people of Jesus' day, intentionally pass by people we don't want to see. We pass by people who have stories of their own, stories that don't mesh with our's, stories that make us uncomfortable. We put up our own boundary lines – we avoid people who aren't clean enough, or who have a hand out for help, or maybe they're a different color or a different sexual orientation, or maybe we know about their past or even their present – and we steer clear of them. Some things never change, and like the people of Jesus' day, we too, have our boundaries.

Jesus calls us to something different. Jesus calls us to see everyone, every single person as a child of God, a person in need of being acknowledged, and

affirmed, and cared for. He calls us to be the ones to stop, and reach out and lead those in need to new life, in whatever ways we can.

This morning's movie clip deals with a family who did just that. The movie is a really wonderful movie of a few years ago, that I know many of you saw – "The Blind Side," which starred Sandra Bullock and Tim McGraw among others.

Just to refresh your memory, or to tell you about it, if you haven't seen the movie, "The Blind Side" is the story of a Southern family by the name of Tuohy, and a young man by the name of Michael Oher. Michael is an African American youth when they meet him, who goes to the same school as their children. He's had a terrible childhood. One of 12 children born to an alcoholic and crack cocaine addicted mother, Michael attended 11 different schools before receiving a scholarship to Briarcrest Christian Academy, the school the Tuohy children also attended.

Leanne Tuohy (the mother) and Sean (the father) notice Michael at various events – they see him sitting in the stands by himself at games, and in the cafeteria by himself at lunch. They can tell he is struggling. He doesn't have any food on the table at lunch, and he doesn't carry a bookbag like the rest of the kids.

One night, after a school play, Leanne and Sean and their son SJ are in their car on the way home. It's a cold, rainy, dreary night – and this is what happens. Take a look.

Clip 1 – "The Blind Side" – 19:57 – 22:00

You know what? A lot of people were leaving the school that night, and no doubt, a lot of people passed Michael walking down the street in the pouring rain – but the Tuohys stopped. They cared enough about this young man, this child of God, and they stopped. He could not have been more different than them, yet they stopped and picked him up and took him to their home.

And thus began their journey together. What began as one night in their home turned into two, then three, and then he became a part of their family. More than just taking care of the bare necessities for Michael, they loved him, and affirmed him, and helped him to see that he was a beloved child of God, who could do anything he set his mind to do.

They, like Jesus, looked beyond the boundaries that society had set up, and loved him just as he was, for who he was. They looked beyond race, they looked beyond background, they looked beyond his family story which was filled with sadness and violence, they looked beyond it all – and simply loved him and cared for him.

And it was not easy. Many of their friends were uncomfortable with it. They simply could not understand how this wealthy, extremely successful, upwardly mobile family could bring in this down-on-his-luck, needy African American young

man. Some of them even chalked it up to the Tuohys simply feeling sorry for him, or doing penance for “white guilt.”

Take a look at another scene from the movie. Leanne is having lunch with some of her high-society, wealthy friends at the country club. Listen to their conversation, and you’ll see that they just don’t get it.

Clip 2 – “The Blind Side” – 46:50 – 48:35

The love that Jesus showed that Samaritan woman, and the love that the Tuohys showed Michael Oher, doesn’t make sense in the eyes of the world that says “look out for number one” and “pull yourself up by your own bootstrap.” But it makes total sense in the eyes of God. It’s what God calls us to do.

Do you know how these stories ended? That woman went home from her encounter with Jesus at the well totally transformed, filled with hope for her future. Not only that, but she told everyone she could about this man Jesus – the one who knew her through and through, yet loved her anyway, the one who helped her say goodbye to her past, and look toward a future flowing from the springs of living water that He provided. And the scripture says that because of her testimony many more Samaritans came to Jesus, and through their encounter with Him, as well, they came to belief too. All because for one lonely woman, Jesus stopped.

And Michael Oher. Well, if you’re a fan of the Baltimore Ravens, you know how his story has gone. While living with the Tuohys, Michael began to play football on his high school team, he went on to play college football at the University of Mississippi, and he has been an offensive lineman on the Baltimore Ravens since 2009, No. 74. His life was changed, because on a rainy, cold night, the Tuohy family stopped.

Friends, there are so many people in the world like that Samaritan woman and like Michael Oher. People who have troubles, people who have pasts and even presents filled with sadness, violence, or just plain loneliness, people who are struggling for so many reasons. And they’re not just sitting by a well or walking down the road, they’re all around you. They might be sitting at a desk near you at work or in school, they might be a neighbor, or a family member, they might be sitting near you right here at church.

Jesus invites us to take time to look around us and see people – really see them, and to reach out and care for those in need, to let them know, through our words and actions, that they are beloved children of God, no matter what the circumstances of their life right now, and that the future can be filled with hope because of the living water Jesus provides.

My friends, it’s not rocket science, it’s not that hard – it’s opening our eyes to see those around us, and treating them like the beloved children of God they are, extending a helping hand wherever we can. That’s what Jesus did, that’s what the

Tuohys did, and that's what we're called to do. May you and I answer that call this day and all the days ahead. Amen.