

“Deal With It!”
 Sermon for 17 December 2023
 Pastor Sam Richards
 Text: John 4:1-15

At the point in time when the Pharisees realized that Jesus’ ministry was eclipsing that of John the Baptist . . . **it is written that Jesus left Judea and that he must needs go through Samaria.** (v. 4) Why the necessity? It is well-known that Jews commonly circumvented Samaria—not wishing to defile themselves. Well, I would suggest that it is because Jesus is about to transform the well of Jacob into an exhibition hall for divine love—we are entering an arena in which the redemptive love of God is at play! It was the plan for Jesus to venture into Samaria, to go to the well of Sychar and to meet with a particular Samaritan woman around noon. I hope that I have set this scene well, Jesus is in the midst of a thriving ministry, he abruptly cuts it off to go and meet with this woman. Jesus’ ministry seems to have retained this “particular” strain, or streak it was never so universal, or general as when it was ***particular and personal***. Today was the day of her salvation in it was a rendezvous meant to be kept. For her, perhaps, her trip to the well was a “walk of shame.” She undertook it to avoid the mockery and censure of the other women and, perhaps, she may even have felt guilty for her adulterous life-style—we are not told the ingredients of her pain. The words “*No more night, no more pain/No more tears, never crying again*” may have been an accurate description of her emotional condition—many have read something like them into her situation. Here is what we know, she came to the well alone *as if* a social outcast. She had an appointment with Jesus, she was a seeker and she appears to have been “lost.” So the rendezvous was about her “discovery,” or her “recovery” by the Good Shepherd. It appears to have come upon her unawares.

Next comes this plaintive song, sung by the orphan Oliver which could be and has been confused with romantic longings (such longings are ill-matched—between an orphan boy and a missing mother figure except perhaps in a romantic comedy)—or, more universally, the lyrics express the longings of a lonely heart. Oliver is not the woman at the well!

Where is love?
 Does it fall from skies above?
 Is it underneath the willow tree
 That I've been dreaming of? -he sings.

Where is she
 Who I close my eyes to see?
 Will I ever know the sweet hello
 That's meant for only me? a missing mother?

Who can say where she may hide?
 Must I travel far and wide?
 'Til I am beside the someone who
 I can mean something to an universal longing?

Where, where is love?

Who can say where she may hide?
 Must I travel far and wide?
 'Til I am beside the someone who
 I can mean something to

the love quest is emphasized.

Where, where is love?

“Oliver” 1962, Lionel Bart

For us, the song poses a good question: “Where is Love?” Where does love come from? “Does it fall from skies above?” Well, yes, sort of. We believe love originates in heaven, certainly originates with God whence it is sent into the world. **God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son . . .** that is the theme of this Advent Sunday.

This is not something one can discover by scanning the universe with telescopes! In other words, love is not discoverable *in the natural order of things* through our normal powers of observation, through study of animals, plants or minerals. It is not listed on the periodic chart of elements! It is not physical, or chemical!—Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral! That love is the heart of the universe must be revealed to us—then we “see” how we are, in John 7, invited into an exhibition hall of divine love, we are in the arena where the displays of love’s splendors are made known! Let me help that expression along. We are the arena in which divine love is made “exceedingly conspicuous, permanently established . . . love is instanced in us” because it is instanced first in God himself. **God is love.** It is his character; and it is his nature—many attributes are rooted in God, but love is foundational to them all.

We could say more: we could add that love is “flagrant, notorious, prominent, clear and proven—love is plain and demonstrated preeminently in the divine mission of God’s Son.” What he was sent to do at Jacob’s well was, ultimately, “love in action:” **Greater love than this knows no man, than that he should lay down his life for his brothers.** The Son of God was sent into the world as the love of God to pay the penalty of our sin and to deliver us from death to life! That is the love of God; the sender, the originator, despite being the one sinned against, despite being the law-giver who is able to save, or to destroy—redeem, or condemn.

We should rewrite the lyrics to “Where Is Love?” thus:

“Where is he
 Who I close my eyes to see?
 Will I ever know the sweet hello
 That’s meant for only me?” **Jesus safety unto her, ‘Give me to drink.’**”

And we would find ourselves singing the song of the woman at the well. We would voice her longing for Jesus, the Messiah, as sought in the realm of “the as of yet unexpressed.” She had not ascended far enough up the mountains to hear the trumpets’ sound; yet she surely was drawing nearer. Near enough to hear Him ask, “Can you give me something to drink?” Jesus visited the scene of the crime so to speak and, reaching past her formidable, shameful and broken sinfulness, expressed love to her—offered her living waters! That is the way of love. It doesn’t wait for us to clear the path to our heart! It comes, presents itself and accosts our heart. This way of winning,

this way of mercy, this path to soul union is that we are called to imitate, to implement, to inaugurate with our family, friends and neighbors.

There was a time when our institutions of higher learning, many of them seminaries for educating a learned/biblical clergy, specialized in training up leadership for this kind of service of love. We desired spiritual men who would show us how to love. How to savingly transform believers into Christ-like workers through word and sacrament, prayer and service! We traded that in for management types, for social justice warriors, religious professionals—abandoning the ancient path of *training for righteousness* through sanctification, or godliness through holiness—through cultivation of spiritual disciplines and self-sacrifice, the way of the cross.

Loving is a hundred-fold more difficult than judging—judging ourselves is harder than finding fault with everyone else. Or identifying injustices to address externally—as if we can compel others to be “just”

We excel at blame-shifting, at lying and slandering and we have become cold-hearted and cruel. We know how to antagonize and divide and hate but, as for healing, love and peace, we are functionally illiterate.

Let us observe the master at work beside the well. He focuses on her hunger, her aspiration, her gifts and not her mess-up’s, failures and sins. He doesn’t shame her—or scold her. He invites. He listens to her and counters her objections with promises—he co-opts her as his water-bearer. She gladly becomes his evangelist! Who wouldn’t gladly work for such a loving, truthful Lord?! **You are a prophet.** Well, not only that. She gains some altitude. **Could this be the Christ?** (v. 29) There we go? And, yes, he admits as much openly! **I am he.** That is who we want to bring others to . . . Christ, your confidante; Christ, your friend.

Christ’s mission is the revelation that God is love. And the incarnation makes that love concrete—tangibly, tactilely, palpably real. The incarnation is God presenting himself as scientifically as our powers of observation can establish—that is what the apostles testified to: we saw, heard, touched, examined him empirically. Deal with it!

There were those in Jesus’ day who denied the afterlife, and denied that resurrection even happened. Paul addressed that issue front on (1 Cor. 15:12–22). But Jesus did so even more directly. When he raised the widow of Nain’s son from the dead, he did so in the midst of the man’s funeral procession! Publicly: he who you believed to be dead is alive. Deal with it. Yes, he put the scoffers and mourners outside Jarius’ house when he raised Jarius’ daughter from the dead. He didn’t argue with them about resurrection. He left them to deal with their own contradictions: she was dead, you say, but she is now alive . . . deal with it! In an identical manner, after raising Lazarus from the dead—after his interment in the grave(!)—he didn’t debate the resurrection deniers. You “know” he was dead, and now you see he is alive. Make of it what you will—the evidence of resurrection, of an afterlife, it is before you, in your midst. Deal with it. God took on human form, appeared in the likeness of a man and **he dwelt among us!** You can philosophize and explain it away all you want, that “proves” nothing. Here’s the proof: God sent his Son and he appeared in our midst and thus we knew him: he was

God enfleshed. End of story. He was the love of God in human form, delivering and saving, redeeming and restoring all things. Deal with it.

Divine love, we further declare, is not a love that leaves us in our sin! It is not a love that pretends that *unrighteousness is okay!* It is not okay. I must be punished—and it was. “A love that cares nothing for the moral character of its object is not love, but hate; it is not kindness, but cruelty. God cannot, being what he is, treat sin as if it were no sin; Jesus came to abolish sin, and to destroy the works of the devil! And therefore we read ‘He sent His Son to be **the propitiation for our sins.**’ . . . it is the death of Christ which makes it possible for God’s love to pour over the ruined and partially removed barrier and to flood a man’s soul *with love and forgiveness* . . . nothing sinful which has the habit, the guilt, the penalty of its sins remains, it is not capable of receiving **the life, which is the highest gift of the love of God**” because sin has been swept away. ‘In thy tenderness, in thy patience, in thy attracting of the publican and the harlot, in thy sympathy with all the erring and the sorrowful, and, most of all in thy agony and passion, in thy cross and death, **I see the glory of God which is the love of God.**’

Christ is the revelation that God is love and that means at least three things: 1. that He is the only begotten Son; 2. that this manifestation is for the whole world; and 3. the end of His mission is the bestowal of everlasting love—the corollary of this last is *everlasting life* towards an everlasting enjoyment of both that love and of that life.

The heart at the center of the universe is a revealed and manifest reality!

What has God done that we might know what he is? John says, Behold the Lamb and see that God is love. John doesn’t depend on logic, or on reason; he says, rather, consider a truth, consider a life. Believe on Him . . . the highest expression of love.

The timeless theme, Earth and Heaven will pass away
It's not a dream, God will make all things new that day
Gone is the curse from which I stumbled and fell
Evil is banished to eternal hell

No more night, no more pain
No more tears, never crying again
And praises to the great, "I am"
We will live in the light of the risen Lamb

See all around, now the nations bow down to sing
The only sound is the praises to Christ, our King
Slowly the names from the book are read
I know the King, so there's no need, no need to dread

No more night, no more pain
No more tears, never crying again
And praises to the great, "I am"
We will live in the light of the risen Lamb

See over there, there's a mansion
Oh, that's prepared just for me

Where I will live with my Savior eternally
And there will be no more night, no more pain

No more, no more tears, never crying again
And praises to the great, "I am"
We will live in the light of the risen Lamb

All praises to the great, "I am"
We're gonna live in the light of the risen Lamb

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Walter S. Harrah

Amen