3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Bessemer - 1958

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IN NOMINE JESU

John 4:39-42 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them; and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because the thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

There was once a Christian cobbler who carried on his trade in a little shop by the sea. One day his pastor called and, seating himself near the workbench, looked on as the man kept on pegging away on shoe after shoe. But before long the monotonous beat of the hammer and the dinginess of the room, lit only by one small window, proved too much for the watcher. Man, he cried, don't you ever get tired of this narrow life? The old cobbler rose from his workbench. Pastor, he said, whenever I feel like that I do this -- and with a sweep of his hand the cobbler went toward the door, opening it to the full. And there, before the two men, stretched out the great, wide, endless sea! Immediately that little room was glorified, wrote the minister, Dr. Jowett -- glorified by the vastness of its relationships -- to fields and skies and rolling sea, and to the Creator of them all.

Our lives are like that. Whether we spend them surrounded by old shoes, as did the cobbler, or among pots, books, desks, machines, trees, mines, makes little difference. They hem us in, these things. The dull routine makes our existence a humdrum affair. The smallness of it all tends to shrivel our souls -- to make us prejudiced and self-centered. What you and I need is to fling open the door of our dingy life. We need to expand our lungs with the refreshing air of a world bigger than I and my little things. We need to catch the Epiphany vision of the sea, the vast sea of men, widening out before us, and of the One who loves them all as He does you and me. Then our small shop -- your life and mine -- will also be glorified, glorified by the vastness of its relationship to the world, and to Him who is THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

Long ago the people of a little town called Sychar caught the vision

of what I am saying. These Samaritans, as they were called, were a mongrel people, part Jewish and part Gentile. And just as impure as their blood was also their religion, a strange mixture of the true and the false; of the hope of the Messiah that had come down to them from their Jewish fathers, and the crude idolatries of the heathen nations surrounding them. They were immensely hated by their superior-minded Jewish neighbors. The Jews have no dealing with the Samaritans, explains John. May I never set eyes on a Samaritan. May I never be thrown into company with a Samaritan. To partake of Samaritan bread is like eating swine's flesh -- there were common sayings among the Jews. And for a Jew to call someone of his own race a Samaritan was like calling him a dog.

To such Samaritans Jesus came. Traveling from Judea to Galilee, He must needs go through Samaria, as Scripture puts it. Jesus goes through, and not hurriedly, or carefully avoiding every contact. He sits down to rest a while when He comes to Jacob's Will; and when a woman from nearby Sychar, one of the town's most notorious characters, approaches to get water, He does not hastily withdraw. Instead, He asks her for a drink. Utterly surprised, she exclaims, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? This gives Jesus His opening, His opportunity to offer her thirsting soul that living water which whosoever will may drink and never thirst again. Salvation is of the Jews -- but not for the Jews only. For Jesus there are no Jews, no Gentiles, only sinners, sinners who are all of one color -- black; sinners whom, without exception, His grace would make whiter than snow. Therefore, with skillful surgery, the all-knowing Savior cuts from the woman the thin veil which covers her soul: Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. And then, as she so stands before Him, filthily naked, but for once blushing, and whispering, as it were, with a faint hope, I know that Messias cometh, His love, all-pardoning, cleansing, covering, beams down on her, I that speak unto thee am He.

As one who has just made the greatest discovery of all ages, the woman runs back to Sychar, her waterpot still standing, significantly, where she had found Jesus. Come, she cries to all who know her so well, come, see a man, which told me all that ever I did; it not this the Christ? They come. They invite Him to their town. They hear Him, for two glorious day, as He invites them -- Samaritans, Outcast, Come unto Me! And then? -- Now we believe, they said to the woman, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. How did they know? Because Jesus had spoken words of salvation to them, to despised Samaritans, even as He had previously spoken them to their town's scarlet woman. If He received her -- and them -- whom could He reject? A new light came into their eyes and lives; and they called Him the Savior of the world.

And for the same reason, because Jesus kept company with Samaritans and others of whom they did not approve, the Jews called Him other names: a Samaritan, and the friend of publicans and sinners. They wouldn't share a Savior with such; they didn't care for a Savior of the world; they wanted a Savior of the Jews, a social Christ, as the Modernists would say, one who would make their Palestine a better place to live in. Blind to their own sinfulness, proud of being the chosen people, they prayed the prayer, O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself; as for the rest of the nations, they are but spittle. And every day the pious Pharisee would thank Heaven that he was not born a woman, a leper, or a Gentile. And yet, times without number, they had heard such prophecies as these: Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee... The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising... All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord; He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. And they accepted these prophecies -- so they said. But Him in whom these prophecies were fulfilled, who received on the same terms both Jew and Gentile, Him they rejected. They had not caught the vision of the Savior of the world.

And what about us? Have we caught the vision of the Savior of the World. Have we gone out of our way to befriend the down-and-outs, the so called scum of society, to draw them closer to ourselves and to the Christ who loves them all? Isn't it true that we have a way -- a very polite, but just as cruel way -- of making it very plain to people who don't rise up to our standards that they are not of our kind? As if the Savior were only of our kind!

One day a minister ventured the opinion that Jesus was probably not white, like the bleached-out Jew of today, but decidedly colored, as the modern nomad Arab is -- and a lady in that audience nearly lost her religion. The bottom seemed to have dropped out of her faith.

What kind of faith have you and I? A faith in a special Savior of our own? Or a faith in the Savior of the world? Let's look into the Scriptures and see how He is pictured there. Already in his infancy we see Him as the Savior who is adored not only by Jewish shepherds, but also by the Wise Men from the distant East; as the Savior who throughout His life held His arms wide open to all men, regardless of race, color, sex, age, learning, morality, or immorality; as the Savior over whose cross the name Jesus shines in three languages: Hebrew, the language of scattered Israel, Greek, that of world-culture, Latin, that of world-empire, and beneath whose cross stand representatives of three continents: Europe, Asia, Africa; as the Savior who after His resurrection gives command: Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; and He is pictured as the Savior who even now, in the heaven of heavens, is thronged about by a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!

That is the vision which we must catch: that Savior and a whole world filled with thirsting souls who need that Savior no more, no less, than you and I. And how can I catch that vision of the Savior of the world? In one way only; by

catching, keeping, marveling at another most wonderful vision -- the vision of my Savior. Once I know -- really know -- who Jesus is, and know -- really know -- what I am, there can be no more astounding and, at the same time, more transforming and more compelling factor in my life than this, that

Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me.

If He did that for me, then I know, too, with the Samaritans, that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. Then the door of my little cobbler shop opens wide and I behold the Epiphany vision of the vast sea of men, and of Him who must certainly love all men because He loves me.

And then, also, will our shop, your life and mine, be glorified -- glorified by the vastness of its relationships to the world, and to the Savior of the world. Now no longer is anybody of any description a foreigner to me, or out of my class. Now, in my little shop, I must tell everyone whom I meet that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And since you and I cannot meet all men because we cannot leave our cobbler's bench, we must send others to spread the good news for us. Meanwhile we keep on praying and cobbling, not wearily, but with a song in our hearts, and a light in our eyes, knowing that we are fixing shoes, and pounding typewriters, and cutting lumber, and mining ore, not for mere money's sake, but for the sake of the Savior of the world, that His kingdom may come to the ends of the earth!

Amen.