

“Team Sport”

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Lawrence Park Community Church

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Last week Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, a respected member of the Jewish community. He does so in the dead of night, to preserve privacy. Today, in broad daylight, he goes to the well of a village and talks with a Samaritan woman. Samaritans in this time period were a literary cue that they would be the “other”. They were not a smart, or as kind, or a powerful or artistic or as holy, as the protagonists. So when we see a Samaritan in a Jesus story, we as contemporary readers already know he is going to twist the expectation. He treats her, for this day and age, as an equal. The well of any village is where households could meet across classes and divides, women would catch up with each other in between chores, children would learn independence by being told to fetch water. It was essential before indoor plumbing, and so Jesus talking with anyone there was not odd. But a Samaritan woman, that was odd.

I invite us to not be thrown back by her being married many times. Remember divorce was basically unheard of at the time, so she was likely widowed. She may have been pitied, but not ostracized. We know that later because she goes and tells the village about her meeting Jesus, and they listen seriously enough to go see for themselves. Still, she is the Other. And she is a woman. And she spars with the Messiah.

In preparing this sermon, I realized that I can't think of any woman in the Bible I would describe as meek or mild. Eve demanded knowledge. Sarai laughed in God's face when God said she would bear children. The women in Moses' story went behind the Pharaoh's back and saved Moses' life. Mary heard the Angel Gabriel proclaim her pregnancy and decided that she would teach her son to cast down the mighty. The meek and mild rarely make good protagonists, I guess.

So the unnamed woman at the well who shares theological one-liners with Jesus is a part of a long line of women who have said “we will be demanding our due respect”. One that continues today.

While I was in Japan, we had fun in the tradition of trying to watch the Olympics with a time zone on the other side of the world. Aside from some technological finagling, and forgetting if we go forwards or backwards from the date, we managed to watch a few of the events. It was gorgeous to see athletes perform at the top of their sport, from across the world.

The Olympics are always full of drama, both highs and lows. This was also true this time, where I was able to hear of the Canadian women losing to the US (though let's make this clear, both teams played beautifully and it really was heartbreaking to see how close it was). I couldn't be prouder of how hard they worked.

Back here in Toronto, I was getting over the last of the jet lag when I woke up with just enough time to hear from the television "and scores! The US has won the gold medal!" I decided that was enough for the morning and went back to sleep.

By the end of the day, the US men's hockey team had Trump on the phone.

President Trump: We'll do it at the White House... we'll just have some fun, we have medals for you guys. And we have to, I must tell you, we're going to have to bring the women's team, you do know that?

United States men's hockey team: [Laughter and cheers]

Trump: I do believe I probably would be impeached, okay?

Team: [More laughter]

Since then, this moment has been exemplified by "Schrodinger's joke". He was just joking, it would be rude to say something. Unless you agree, then he is 100% serious. Women everywhere (and many men) know this all too well. Don't take it personally, quit being emotional, it was not that serious.

Until it is that serious. This is the same government who is cutting funding for sports left and right, who is enacting trans policing laws that would prevent trans women from participating (and also destroy a lot of cis women and men, in the name of "women's safety"), that is gutting women's rights before our eyes. But don't take it personally, don't be so emotional.

I think this is why this moment, of months and months of sexist nonsense brewing, proved to be the catalyst for a lot of women. In order to celebrate the men, he had to step on the women. He wanted to. And for better or worse, the men's team didn't disagree at that moment. The women

won a gold medal just the same as the men, but they were disregarded and not taken seriously at all.

International Women's Day is about how we must work together as a team. That rights for all mean rights for all, and that everyone is required to make this work.

We see this when women and girls are not considered individuals with autonomy, but as pawns. Last week, in the American-Israeli attacks on Iranian bases, one of the areas hit was an all-girls school. Girls are allowed to go to school in Iran, but it is the first place of restrictions and government control for many of them. It is also therefore one of the first places girls learn that they can rebel. They see the confines of a government that out of a theocratic warp has permitted child marriage, domestic violence, sexual assault, and criminalizes abortion and contraception. Women and girls are legally defined by their connection to a man, whether their father, brother, husband, son, or uncle. At school, they get to be themselves.

At least 165 girls were killed in the attack. The US, the likely military behind the attack, is not admitting anything but is saying they do not aim for civilian targets.

International Women's Day is about sexism and injustice are a constant in society that need to be named and abolished. For all of these accounts, women and girls are seen as jokes, pawns, victims, or not seen at all.

Woman, Life, Freedom

Jesus could have followed that trope. We don't even get a name for the Samaritan woman! Instead, he sees her, knows her, treats her as an equal. He knows her background, and only says so to demonstrate he is omniscient. He says that the Living Water is for everyone, including her. He is the Messiah for all. She is one of the first to share this revelation with others, and together they are able to enjoy this glimpse of God's kin-dom.

Rights for all means rights for all. For women in theocratic regimes and fascist dictatorships. Women in sports, the arts, business, academics. For those who choose to have children, and for those who don't. For trans women, nonbinary women, for queer women. For women with disabilities. For the sweetest angels, and the prickliest thorns. For the Jew, the Gentile, and the Samaritan. All means all. And it means we work together. With allies, with each other, we play a team sport where respect, dignity, and justice are the goals. Together, we all win.

There have been activists for all of these concerns over the decades. NGOs for Iranian women and girls to receive domestic violence, and encourage education at all levels. There are activists on this continent as well, holding the delicate balance of the regime and the American military's track record with regime change.

In North America the same men who were laughing with Trump are now facing repercussions from fans at home when they return to the NHL. And the interest in the PWHL has skyrocketed.

Women are treated as equals, treat each other as equals, and together move the world. We demand Living Water for all, not just the ones who find the right well. And God gives us all the Living Waters.

Amen