

“Don’t dare to be ‘nice’!” John 4:4-19, 25-30

“Jesus had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' 11 The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' 13 Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' 15 The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.' 16 Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' 17 The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.' 19 The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. [...], 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' 26 Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.' 27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you seek?' or, 'Why are you talking with her?' 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.”

Last week we talked about the fact that we can’t make anyone Christian, we can only deliver God’s message. Changing of hearts and creating the faith itself is purely a work of God.

Today we’ll meditate on how to share this message, the Good News about what God the Father did for us through His beloved Son Jesus Christ.

Let me begin with some interesting facts. Recently there was a comprehensive study done on religion and spirituality in Western culture. And this is one of the finding. Most of respondents believed that the main purpose of Christian faith is to serve ones wellbeing, put it otherwise, to make one happy.

Their creed would sound like this. “I believe that there is a god. He want people to be nice and fair to each other, as it is taught by most world religions. I believe that the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself.”

Does any of these sound familiar? It should, for this is such a widespread misunderstanding about Christian faith. Both, outside of the Church, and unfortunately, also inside. It is often called therapeutic Christianity, for the main concern of this kind of thinking is about people feeling good, about personal happiness and fulfilment.

When we accept this kind of therapeutic Christianity, it determines how we think about God. God of this Christianity can't make too many demands, for His very job is to solve our problems and to make us feel good about ourselves.

And if Biblical message is about feeling good, that's what we need to strive for. We need to create environments where people can feel good, where they can be happy and fulfilled, and so on.

If we go this route, we need to remove all the obstacles, anything that may cause people feel bad. We can't scare them away talking about repentance from their sins, or about keeping the Holy day holy...

...about immersing themselves in a study of God's word, about building character through sufferings, prayers and service to others. No, it could offend them and make them feel threatened.

If this is how we think, then we get Christianity that was so famously described by American theologian Richard Niebuhr: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross." That's where we end up following the trail of this 'feeling good' Christianity.

In today's Gospel reading we heard about Jesus encounter with a Samaritan woman. It is quite a story if we see it through the eyes of 1st century people. Jesus was heading from Judea to Galilee through Samaria. Tired He stay near the Jacob's well while His disciples went to nearby Sychar village to get some food.

There He met a Samaritan woman, and engaged into conversation with her. And what a conversation! As you remember, Jesus conversation partner in previous chapter of John's gospel was Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler, respectable and pious man.

This time Jesus conversation partner is totally different. First, it's she. In 1st century Palestine, there was clear distinction between men and women. Many considered women to be somehow less valuable than men. Nevertheless Jesus choose to converse with this woman.

Besides, she was a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans had had a long lasting enmity, which went back to 8th century before the Christ, when Assyrians

conquered Northern kingdom of Israel, sent many of Israelites into exile and instead brought in other nations.

This mix of different nations and religious believes was abomination in eyes of Jews. That's why they regarded Samaritans as unclean people. Nevertheless Jesus choose to talk with this woman.

She wasn't just a woman and Samaritan. As we can see from John's account, there was definitely something wrong with her. Usually women went to draw water from a well together. This woman came alone. The reason for it was quite obvious.

She had had five husbands. Five! They either died, or divorced her, we are not told. Now she was living together with another man, who wasn't even her husband. In any society, whatever liberal its values are, this kind of track record clearly stands out. Nevertheless Jesus choose to address this woman.

Just think, how encouraging it is for us. There is nothing that can prevent Jesus to engage with you. Nothing. Nothing that you are, nothing that you have done. Nothing can separate you from Him, for Jesus hasn't come to save righteous, but sinners, real sinners. You better admit that you are one of them.

Now let's look at their conversation. Jesus begun by asking her to give Him a drink. It was quite unconventional to do it, as we already saw it. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"

Jesus answered: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Now be careful, beginning from here you can see that this conversation is going on two levels. It's so interesting. Jesus just pointed out that He isn't just a guy who wants to chat with a girl in a quiet place. He has something unbelievably precious to offer.

We have this imagery of water in many places in the Bible. Thus prophet Jeremiah compares true God with a spring of living water, while our idols are just broken cisterns that can't hold a water. (Jer. 2:13)

The woman replied, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?" What was she thinking?

She obviously didn't get what Jesus was saying her. What is this guy up to? He doesn't have anything to draw water. How can he get it? Is he just flirting? Or does he claim to be larger than patriarch Jacob?

Jesus continued: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again ... The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Still trying to tell her that what He can offer is eternal life, the riches of God, the salvation.

But the woman still didn’t get it: “O, yes, Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” Yes, talk to me more, bring me not just this living water, bring me stars from the sky, let us rejoice together. This is what we can hear in her words.

Here it was enough for Jesus. He cut her wings by “Go, call your husband, and come here.” But she couldn’t stop this game that easy. “But I have no husband.” And here came the moment of truth.

The moment that changed everything. “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’, for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

How heavy these words were! How accusing! They definitely didn’t make her feel good about herself. They summarized her entire life, as she later said: “He told everything about me.”

They didn’t make her feel good, but they did much more. Finally she began to listen. “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” “I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will tell us all things.” Then Jesus said to her, “I, who speak to you, am he.”

At this moment Jesus disciples showed us, so the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”

There are quite a few things this passage helps us to see. First, how much did the woman initially appreciate what Jesus said? He spoke about great things. About something that would change her life. He spoke with her about the Gospel, about the living water, that would give her eternal bliss.

What was her reaction? “Thanks for the Good News, Jesus! I’m ready to become a Christian.” No, that wasn’t her reaction. ‘Hi-hi, ha-ha. Yes, give me this water. Sure. No, I have no husband. Just continue.’ Only when Jesus turned their conversation toward her life, her past, conversation suddenly changed and became meaningful.

It is not the most pleasant thing to remind people about their sins. It doesn’t create a safe and unthreatening environment. No! It can and usually is quite

offensive. It hurts. But unless the truth is spoken, unless God's evaluation upon our lives is pronounced, we are living in funny illusions about who we are.

You see, that's a clear Biblical message that a sinner can't see Holy God and remain alive. (Ex 33:20) Whenever we approach to Holy God, whenever we hear what His demands for our lives are, we are in danger. In real danger, for God's holy law kills sinners.

We can't create an environment where people can meet true God and wouldn't feel threatened. It is not possible. Not in this world. Not where we all are sinners and He is our ultimate judge. His holiness alone reveals our sins, awake our consciences and makes us feel so uncomfortable.

There are only two routes. We can create environments where there is no place for God of the Bible. We can do it by withholding the truth, the fact that we all are sinners rightly deserving God's wrath, that we all desperately need God's grace and forgiveness.

Then we can try to deceive ourselves that everything is good, we are so good. But you won't help anyone withholding the truth and pretending that everything is fine. You'll just help them to remain in their illusions.

Just imagine, what would you think about a doctor, who would make you feel good telling that everything is good, everything is fine, but hiding the fact that you have a terminal decease and are going to die unless you receive proper treatment. What would you think about him? What a nice person? No...

Other route is using those means which God Himself has given. Namely, we speak His word, as law and Gospel and lead people where God Himself has promised to be present, - not to judge, not to condemn, but to forgive our sins, to purify all wrongs that've been done to us, to listen to our prayers and to bless us in so many ways - that is here, in the Divine Service.

Christian faith is not about feeling good about ourselves. It is about having good conscience. No one can have a good conscience by simple being told that everything is good, you are wonderful person, all you do is fine, etc. if you are not yet reconciled with God. It doesn't work.

Think about the Samaritan woman. Until Jesus spoke truthfully about her life, she was just flirting. Everything seemed fine. No need for savior. No need for forgiveness. Only when she saw what her life looks like, only then she heard a wake-up call.

You can't have a good conscience by pretending or denying that you have sinned against the Lord God. You can have it only when you admit your rebellion,

that you have fallen short of God's demands, and then hear these words, - 'by the command and instead of Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins.'

Then you are truly set free. Your conscience is good, for you know that you have been utterly honest with the Father and you've been forgiven and accepted, then you can approach God without fear.

Then God's presence and His demands are not threatening anymore. Then God presence is the safest place you can think of. For you are forgiven! You are accepted as you are. You are reconciled with the Father. You have received new life, new identity – a beloved child of God.

I wish there was other way to bring people to Christ. By having fun together, by being friendly, by telling them how wonderful people they are. I really do. But there is no other way.

We can't love people by telling them lies, or not telling them the truth. We can only follow the example of Jesus. Telling the truth in love. Just think for a while, how did the Son of God deliver us this truth?

Being God, He became one of us. He emptied Himself, He took our place, died our death, so that only He could reconcile us to Himself, to show how much He loves us and tell us the truth about us and about our options.

Jesus wished that there was another solution. He didn't want to go to the cross. He had this choice, - His life or ours. He or you. He prayed the Father several times. If only it is possible, take this cup away from me! It wasn't possible.

Jesus was left to make up His mind freely... and you know what He chose. He chose – you! The Son of God chose your life over His. He died so that you can be forgiven. He rose again so that you can live with Him forever. He did it for you. Paying the ultimate price. It is incredible, how much He loves you!

These are the most wonderful news anyone has ever heard. God loving you more than His life. But the Gospel of reconciliation doesn't make sense, it is not appreciated unless you know that you are a sinner heading to the final judgment.

Now we are sent to be Jesus messengers. To share the Gospel in the same way He did it. Living sacrificially for others, considering them more important than ourselves, loving them not with words, but with deeds.

Then telling them the truth about what we are, calling sin a sin, and giving them the cure - forgiveness that comes from Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Amen.