

March 15, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: John 4.4-30; 39-42

The Message: The Soul Received

James Hillman (who wrote a book called, 'We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy – And the World's Getting Worse') was a psychologist who criticized most psychologies for denying the existence of the soul.

"The problem of finding the soul again burns as perhaps no other issue."

Losing the loving courageous connection to life - that is losing the soul.

We hear the story of a Samaritan woman who has certainly lost her soul: a woman who comes to a well to get water. She is minding her own business, doing the heavy lifting that women did in those days. She knows her place, is suspicious of the obviously Jewish man who leans against the well as she approaches it at high noon; and she is understandably taken aback when he not only speaks to her but asks for her help.

"Give me a drink."

She is a Samaritan. He is a Jew. She is a woman. He is a man. It is a highly public place. Jesus, as usual, is inviting trouble. He should not be speaking to a woman in the first place, let alone a member of a tribe of Israel at odds with the Jewish people, let alone one who is despised and outcast by her own people for her life style. No wonder that Paul writes that Christ died for the ungodly; he persistently drew them to himself.

"Give me a drink."

Jesus is thirsty, but so and in a different, and deeper, way is the Samaritan woman. She thirsts for God, for grace, for life, for her soul back. A person who loses her soul is unable to take her place in society, to engage in its rituals, to feel one with its traditions.

"The water that I will give will become ... a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

God's grace is water for the thirsty, water for you and for me. Everlasting water, eternal life for all of us.

When they start talking, they are perfect strangers. By the end of their conversation, the woman is so excited that she wants everyone to know about the man whom she has just met.

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Even her not-fully-formed, in-process faith is enough to invite others and make a difference in their lives. She becomes a great witness to God's presence, mystery and power.

In the encounter with Jesus, she finds her very soul.

By the end of the passage, it is not just a woman who is excited about Jesus but a whole town full of Samaritans.

“And many more believed because of his word ... ‘we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.’”

A whole town full of people have found their souls.

Like the Samaritan woman in this week's gospel, we can and do lose our souls. We lose them whenever we no longer see the connection between who we are and the love of God. Jesus, in his intimate encounters with others, helped people re-establish that deep connection with themselves where God and healing are found. He cut through the regulations that people established in order to determine who was worthy and unworthy. By declaring to the woman at the well that she was worthy to receive eternal life he was also declaring that all were worthy to drink from that life-giving stream.

Jesus puts us in touch with the experience of a love that embraces us at a level deeper than thought and action. When that happens, we find something that was broken inside us mended, something that was lost in us is suddenly found. And the need for all the old suspicions, all the old rivalries and all the old fears just disappears. We receive our very souls. May it be so for you.