

Sermon 2008 Lent 3

Text: John 4:5-26

Theme: "I Don't Want a Porcelain Jesus"

Some have accused me of being a man with far too little to do because I often think about things that others ignore. For instance our altar guild can tell you of my one-man war against fake things at the altar. I don't like plastic flowers on the flower stand. I don't like electric eternal lights and I don't like fake candles that burn oil. I think that the real body and real blood of Jesus deserve real liturgical accompaniments.

And as long as I'm having a rant, here's another thing that bothers me. Have you ever paid attention to the materials used to make statues of Jesus? Don't you think some concern should go into the materials we use to sculpt our Lord? For instance, when I lived in Texas there was a radio evangelist who gave away little plastic statues of Jesus with an adhesive on the base so that you could stick Jesus on your dashboard. He had a little ditty that said:

"I don't care if it rains or freezes,  
Long as I have my plastic Jesus,  
Up on the dashboard there."

It seems somehow strange to me to have Jesus molded in plastic. Shouldn't we cast him in gold or silver? And it's not only the value of the material that I notice, but the type of material as well. For instance, I don't like Jesus cast in porcelain either. Should Jesus be so fragile? So easily broken? I like it when Jesus is cast in a powerful material that can endure and overcome. Now when all is said and done, it doesn't really matter if you have a plastic Jesus on your dashboard or a porcelain Jesus in your living room but I fear that too many of us have a porcelain Jesus in our faith life as well.

For too many Christians Jesus is an attractive idea but he gets set upon the mantle to be observed. We don't let him do anything. All the neighbors come by and observe him. They comment on how nice our Jesus is, how he really dresses up the place. We justify your sinful choices and evil desires by pointing

to our mantles and saying, "Hey, look at my porcelain Jesus, isn't he great?"

I don't want a Jesus that sits on the mantle. I don't want the idea of Jesus. I want the Jesus that the Samaritan woman came across at the well. I want a hot, sweaty tired Jesus who frankly probably had b.o. I want a real Jesus who knows what it is to be me; to feel the sorrow of loss, to feel the pain of betrayal, to know the pain a human body feels. I want a Jesus who knows the devil that hounds me each and every day because he came face to face with that devil.

That's my Jesus. He's the Jesus that the Samaritan woman met. He is fully human so he *is* hot and he *is* tired, but he took the time to reach out to the woman who was nothing. He was a Jewish Rabbi, she a Samaritan tramp who had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married. Yet he took the time, because he loved her. Just like he loves you no matter what you've done. Jesus, because of his love for us, goes that extra mile.

My Jesus is strong enough to boldly walk into a hostile place full of hostile people. The Samaritans didn't like the Jews one bit and most Jews walked out of their way, across the Jordan river, up past Samaria and back across the Jordan river to avoid having to walk in Samaria. But Jesus is powerful. Hostile people do not frighten him. He even looks them in the eye and asks them for a drink of water. Now that is power. When you can ask someone who hates you for help; that is a demonstration of raw, unrestrained power.

Although his garments did not become dazzling white and there was no voice from heaven - this may have been almost as clear a demonstration of his divinity as the Mount of Transfiguration.

We too are called to go into hostile lands and speak to hostile people. Faith in Christ is not pretty porcelain. Faith in Christ is bricks and mud. Faith in Christ is hot furnaces refining pure gold. And frankly folks, there are quite a number of Christians who get into it a little ways and leave because it's too

hard-too ugly. They were looking for a pretty porcelain Jesus and found a hot, tired, sweaty Jesus. They discovered that it was not easy doing what we are called to do in an imperfect place working against sinful people. So they leave.

These are the people who seem so committed at first, but as soon as adversity comes along they leave – don't want to get that porcelain Jesus broken. These are people who prefer to create their own version of Christianity and couch their doctrine in terms of "well I know that's what the Church says, but I believe...." Or when confronted with their incorrect ideas and false notions simply try and find other people to agree with them as though having enough human agreement will outweigh the Word of God. But you gotta do whatever you gotta do to protect that porcelain Jesus.

But you know what? I don't have to protect *my* Jesus. He's real. He's all powerful, all knowing and eternal. I will admit, however, that he is also demanding. While he never expects anything from us that he has not done himself, he has done it all.

And while we might moan and whine about the difficulty and harshness of it all, he still demands from us no less than perfect obedience to him. It is hard and dirty work folks.

It is sitting with all the filth of humanity. It is going into scary emotional and spiritual places where the terrain is unknown and unsafe. It is *going*, not reclining in our comfortable lives. It is taking time to proclaim the news to people who are unappreciative and frankly undeserving in hopes that the Holy Spirit might work in one of them. It is bailing out a leaking boat with a thimble. It is walking along a stormy and dark beach awash in dying starfish washed ashore in the storm and taking the time to stoop over, pick one up and return it to the sea – and having done that – being wet and cold and frightened – doing it again, and again, and again until your back hurts and your fingers are raw. It is getting through the day and at the end of the day being able to face Jesus and say, I made a difference today Lord, maybe not much of one, but I made a difference in your kingdom.

The task would be overwhelming with a porcelain Jesus. But we have been led to the water of eternal life and at our baptisms we drank so deeply that we will never thirst again. We stand on that stormy beach with an indomitable spirit, resolute in our commission to continue reaching the lost and helping the hurting. Resolute in our war against evil and knowing that the one who fights by our side has already conquered the evil one, so while he can prowl about and roar, he is already doomed. And those of us who are his children stand on that beach awaiting the day our rescuer returns for us to take us away from this dark and stormy world and on that day we will look up and see our Jesus alive and standing at the prow of the ship with his arms open wide shouting above the blasting trumpets, "Well done good and faithful servants!" AMEN.