

Sunday Service

9:00 AM & 10:30 AM

August 16, 2020

Finding the Messiah-Finding Wholeness

Summary

God wants us to experience true wholeness. We can be made whole only through a relationship with Him. If we fail to experience this wholeness, it is because we reject the truth about our sinfulness and brokenness and try to find wholeness in relationships, or material wealth or accomplishments, or even religious behaviors. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, the salvation

and wholeness that God offers us costs us nothing. We don't have to earn His love or do anything to receive salvation. We just have believe that He is who He says He is and take Him at

His word, and stop trying to find wholeness in things or other people.

Main Scriptures

John 3:16

John 4:3-34

Introduction

If you are new to our fellowship at Northshore, you may not know that in January we began a reading and teaching plan that will carry us through the entire Bible by the end of the year. We recently completed our journey through the Old Testament and this is our third week in the New Testament. We're in the thick of Jesus' earthly ministry pursuing the theme, "Finding the Messiah." Today's message and this week's reading plan is focused on finding wholeness through our relationship with Christ.

Finding Wholeness

If you haven't had the chance to join us in the Foundations reading plan or have just gotten behind, let me encourage you simply start fresh. Don't try to catch up. Just join us where we are.

If you don't have the daily devotion book that goes along with the readings, we have a few left, but the reading guide is free and lists the verses we are reading together. Both the devotion and the reading guide are available in our Connection Center in the lobby.

Message

I want to begin this morning with the question, "What does it mean to be whole?"

No sermon would be complete without a dictionary definition, so let's consider this entry from dictionary.com.

Wholeness

adjective

1. all of; entire.
2. in an unbroken or undamaged state; in one piece.

It's that second entry, "in an unbroken or undamaged state;" that I'd like to focus on. Very few of us would claim that we've never been hurt in a relationship, and none of us can claim that we've never messed up, and so we can't say that we're unbroken. God's word tells us that we are all impacted by sin. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah says it most kindly:

Isaiah 53:6

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;

The Apostle Paul is a little more blunt in His letter to the church at Rome:

Romans 3:23

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Pastor Ben Stuart of Passion City Church in Washington D. C. has a bold witness among the movers and shakers in our nation's capital. Though his audience is made up of powerful people, He doesn't pull any punches. When he shares His personal testimony about encountering Christ,

he uses the phrase, "I finally realized that there is just something wrong with me."

This flies in the face of the common self-help mantra that guilt is okay because it means I have done something wrong, but shame means I believe there is something wrong with me, and that's

not consistent with a healthy self-image. With apologies to my profession as a counselor, the reason we do wrong is because we are sinful. It's not popular, but to claim otherwise is not consistent with the teachings of God's word.

We can be made whole.

But there's a solution for our brokenness. We can be made whole. We were created by a loving God and though we have all gone astray, the central message of scripture is that God has been pursuing us to restore us and make us whole.

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus leads with the good news. God's love is strong enough to save us. But it cost Him everything. We shall not perish if we will receive His gift and we can be made whole. Here's the bad news: those who reject Him will perish. It's another one of those unpopular truths.

Many critics of Christianity condemn the narrow, exclusivity of the Biblical prescription for salvation and wholeness. It's not that it's hard to understand or difficult to receive the free gift that Jesus paid for on the cross. But it requires us to acknowledge that there is something wrong with us that we can't fix on our own.

If we can learn the humility it takes to acknowledge our sinfulness, our brokenness, Christ can make us whole. But even when we accept the truth about our incompleteness, we have to reject all the other solutions that compete with Christ and His offer to make us whole.

Wholeness, completeness, satisfaction, peace. We are all longing for a state in which all our needs and desires have been satisfied. Sometimes we find a temporary fix and we get a glimpse of what this wholeness we seek would be like. But it never lasts.

One of the most common barriers to the experience of true wholeness and enduring peace is the belief that wholeness comes from human relationships.

We cannot find true wholeness in a relationship with another person.

Throughout history, there has been a romantic notion that the greatest experience of wholeness will come through a relationship with the right person. You know; the one, your soulmate.

The 1996 movie Jerry Maguire is based loosely on the real life story of a professional sports agent who became disillusioned by the money and success he thought would make him happy. There are two memorable lines from this movie that you've likely heard, even if you didn't get the reference. The first is Cuba Gooding Junior's tag line "Show me the money!" Slightly less well known is the quote from Tom Cruise as Jerry that marks the romantic high point in the film. Things had gotten rocky in his new marriage, and in an impassioned speech to his wife in front

of a room full of her friends, he concludes with the phrase, (say it with me if you remember) "You complete me."

Here's a couple of recent FaceBook posts that have a similar theme:

"One day, someone will love you the way you deserve to be loved and you won't have to fight for it."

"You deserve to be with someone who looks at you like they've won the lottery."

I don't want to pour cold water on the notion of romantic love. Being in love is one of the most wonderful things we can experience. I know that I am blessed to have been married for 26 years to the one I'm in love with. But I'm not perfect. I'm sinful. I am not capable of being the primary source of wholeness for my wife. And if I expect her to be that most important source of comfort and strength in every circumstance, I'll end up resenting her because she doesn't live up to the standard of perfection that I can't live up to either.

Expecting a person, a friend, a romantic partner to give us everything we need is not just unwise; it's unfair.

In our main scripture passage for today, Jesus encounters a woman who had bought into the idea

that a relationship with the right man would complete her. It didn't work the first time, but she hadn't given up.

Let's consider together the Biblical account of this encounter in John 4:3-34

I'll invite you to read along in your Bible, in the sermon notes, or on the screen. What we're about to read together is unique among all the accounts of Jesus ministry provided to us in the Gospels. This encounter between Jesus and the woman he encounters at Jacob's well is the only

account of a private conversation that he initiates with an individual outside his inner circle, and the back and forth that results is surprising for its range of topics and frankness.

This morning I'd like for us to focus on some specific points that contribute to our understanding of the relationship Jesus wants us to have with him; the only relationship that will lead to true wholeness.

So I'll begin with verse 3 in John, Chapter 4.

3 So He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. 4 Now He had to go through Samaria. 5 So He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to His son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

One of the first things we see is that the Samaritan woman had a little bit of a chip on her shoulder. She assumed Jesus would treat her like any other Jewish man.

Finding true wholeness in Christ requires us to let go of our assumptions about what he wants from us.

Too often, those who reject Christ do so because they believe He doesn't understand what they really need. Jesus wanted the Samaritan woman to understand, and He wants us to understand, that He knows better than we do what we really need, and He wants to give it to us.

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."

If we see Jesus for who He is, we will know that He has what we need.

The phrase, "the gift of God" was commonly used by devout Jews to refer to the Torah. Jesus is

not criticizing the woman personally, but He is bemoaning the fact that both the Jews and the Samaritans had stopped listening to the word of God that had already been revealed to them.

The

Samaritans only had the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Their religious culture had been cut off from Orthodox Judaism and the additional resources found in the books of the Prophets. The majority of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah are found in the Prophets. The significant point that Jesus is making is that people who are faithful to follow the truth about God that they have been given will recognize His revelation when it comes to them.

We've challenged ourselves as a church to shore up our knowledge of the truth we've been given

through our Bible reading plan. Jesus challenges us to know His written Word so that we will see

Him clearly as He continues to reveal Himself to us.

Jesus was carefully leading the Samaritan woman to the truth, but she was still skeptical.

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it Himself, as did also His sons and His livestock?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Literally vs. Figuratively

People seem to get the terms "literally" and "figuratively" mixed up. Any time someone says "I am literally starving to death," they've gotten it wrong. Here we see the Samaritan woman stuck on the literal meaning of water and thirst when Jesus is using them figuratively. He's actually going one step further because he's not just using thirst to represent a general longing for satisfaction. Jesus' words have existential or eternal meaning. He is talking about our ultimate need.

People who are stuck in the literal are not necessarily unintelligent or incapable of logical thought. Scientific Materialism is the view that there is nothing real, true or meaningful that cannot be measured and quantified. Individuals that embrace this view reject the notion of God and spiritual truth because there is no scientific evidence that God exists. It is not true that all or most scientists and philosophers are atheists, but those who embrace the notion that there is something beyond or larger than what we can see and measure often find themselves at odds with Scientific Materialism and those who don't want to let God into the conversation.

In a broad sense this entire sermon represents a figurative use of the concept of wholeness to explore the much larger truth about salvation and a right relationship with God.

Let's get back to our scripture where things are about to take a strange turn.

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

This woman had applied the old adage, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," to marriage. I don't want to make light of her situation. She had given herself fully to men that she thought

would complete her only to be told at least five separate times, "I don't want you anymore." She had been rejected over and over, but she kept trying to find what she was looking for in relationships that were far from the ideal.

Just like she labored daily to obtain the water she needed to satisfy her thirst, she was laboring to

satisfy the need of her soul day after day through failed relationships and superstitious religious beliefs. Jesus offered to fulfill the longing she had in a way that would only grow more satisfactory each day.

The world around us has rejected the Biblical template for marriage. Without cataloging all the alternatives that are claimed to be as good as or equivalent to heterosexual marriage, we can know that any human relationship that doesn't begin with partners who are surrendered to Christ

first will ultimately fail to provide the wholeness we are looking for; even if it is a traditional marriage between a man and a woman.

Before we respond to harshly to those seeking satisfaction and wholeness through alternative lifestyles or non-traditional relationships, we need to acknowledge that the mistake in these circumstances is seeking wholeness apart from Christ. No relationship with another person will satisfy our deepest needs.

The point of our passage this morning is not to define the right kind of marriage. The point is that

anything, including marriage or other relationships, that keeps us from a deep and intimate relationship with Christ will ultimately rob us from the wholeness, the completeness, the peace that only He can give us.

Many sinful behaviors and a number of potentially good, wholesome things can distract us from putting Christ first and achieving true wholeness. Distractions that we fail to subordinate to Christ will eventually lead from distraction to destruction.

As we continue with our passage we see that the Samaritan woman is starting to get it. She suspects that there is more to Jesus than just another thirsty traveler.

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

She is testing her understanding of religion with someone who may have a better answer than she

has heard before.

21 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do

not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

“Salvation is from the Jews,” is not a slight against the Samaritans. It’s a slight against the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day, because they had abandoned God and the true purpose of His covenant with them. From the very first covenant that God made with Abraham, the father of all Israelites, it was clear that God intended to use those He had chosen to introduce Him to the rest of the world.

Genesis 26:4

4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,

The Psalmist fully embraced this purpose for which God had chosen the Hebrew people.

Psalm 67:1-5

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine on us— 2 so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. 3 May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. 4 May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. 5 May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.

When God’s plan is fully realized, all nations will know Him and praise Him. His desire is for us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. That God is Spirit means that He is beyond our material world. He created it after all. And to truly know Him and worship Him, we must accept that He is bigger and more than we can know. We worship Him in spirit when we acknowledge that He created us and all that we are is the result of His creative effort. We worship Him in truth when we receive fully the written revelation He has given us in the Holy Scriptures. If we reject any teaching of scripture because it’s inconvenient or hurts our feelings, we cannot worship Him in spirit and in truth.

This resonates with something Pastor Andrew said in His message on Finding the Courage to Unite a few weeks ago. He said:

Another reason this is bold is because it is risky. Not because it isn’t true, but because God’s word will sometimes conflict with what may feel natural to us. You see, there is an ever-

increasing tendency to adopt our own opinions and our feelings as the truth rather than the truth

of God. When that happens, it naturally affects our view of who God is, our choices, lifestyles, and relationships. I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "yeah I know what God's Word says, but I feel like this other way is the right choice for me." The pursuit of holiness and living a Godly life doesn't work that way.

Finally, in our passage, we see the Samaritan woman get to the place Jesus had been leading her to.

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

We know she really got it because of her response.

27 Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

Based on what we know about the Samaritan woman, we might assume that she was not held in high regard in her village. She had fallen down the social ladder to a status that was equivalent to being a prostitute. It is unlikely that she had a voice in any public setting, and would likely have been, or perhaps had been, ridiculed for anything she had to say. But when she finally realized what Jesus was offering her she was filled with a boldness and confidence that moved her to tell everyone in her village that she had found what they were all looking for.

When we have been made whole, we can speak the truth and obey God without any fear of what others will think.

Not only had her encounter with Jesus moved her to speak, it had changed her in a way that was obvious to the people she spoke to. They didn't ridicule her as they might have in the past. They believed her and followed her back to the well to see Jesus for themselves.

31 Meanwhile His disciples urged Him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then His disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought Him food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work."

Jesus had not had anything to eat. He hadn't had anything to drink either because the woman ran off before drawing any water from the well.

Jesus is both a model and the source of true wholeness.

Jesus modeled for His disciples and for us the satisfaction that comes from knowing and doing the will of God. It is so filling (yes, I'm being figurative here) that our literal need for food and water, or any number of things, fades when we are satisfied by Him.

Jesus encouraged His followers to fast. This temporary denial of the food that we must have to live allows us to explore this deeper satisfaction that He promises.

We can fast from things that ultimately we need like food, but a deeper relationship with Christ can also come from fasting from things that we don't really need, but like a whole lot. Our Catholic brothers and sisters give up specific comforts for the Lenten season. Perhaps this is something we can learn from them.

Whenever we give up something that we count on for comfort, it helps us remember that our ultimate satisfaction can be found only in Christ. Anything that we put before Him, no matter how good or worthwhile, can keep us from experiencing the joy, the peace, the comfort, the wholeness that He wants us to find in Him alone.

As we come to a close, I want us to consider together the memory verses from this week's Bible reading plan in the Foundations devotion.

Luke 14:26-27

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33

33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

This may seem like a stern note to end on, but these are the words of the Savior who died for us and wants us to find the greatest joy we can possibly imagine in this life and the next through our relationship with Him.

As our Praise Team comes to lead us, I want to challenge you think about the things that may stand in the way of the relationship, the wholeness that Christ is calling you to.

Let's pray.