

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
“And is Better than Or: Offer and Acceptance”
Psalm 32; John 4:5-30
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I knew what it was. It was another offer. I had already said no to a first one...yet there it was sitting on the counter at my parent's house. As long as I could remember I wanted to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. I interviewed in college and waited for their offer. When it finally arrived I was stunned. They wanted to me to go to Lesotho, a small kingdom inside South Africa, and run an eight million dollar agricultural co-op. Now, as a suburban boy who knew nothing about agriculture this did not seem to be something I could deal with...so I turned them down. In reality there was a bit of relief in that choice. I would not have to move to a foreign country, learn a new language and leave behind all of my family and friends. Needless to say I was very surprised when the second offer arrived. I wasn't at all sure that I was interested in even opening it. Offer and acceptance...they were both needed to make things work.

In a sense that is where we find ourselves in our morning's story. It is a story of an offer being made and someone having to decide if they will accept it. We begin with Jesus and his disciples out and about and traveling across an area called Samaria. Normally they would not have crossed into this territory but they were headed to Jerusalem and it would greatly shorten their trip. It is lunch time and the disciples go off to see if they can find some food. Jesus waits by a well. As he waits a woman arrives to draw water. Jesus engages in her in a conversation. What this means in the Gospel of John is that Jesus wants to offer her something...and we will find out what in a couple of minutes. The woman wants no part of it. And she wants no part of it for a variety of reasons; first and foremost is the fact that Jews, meaning Jesus, and Samaritans, meaning the woman, are enemies. The two groups have hated each other for almost four-hundred years. In addition the woman does not believe Jesus has anything to offer her. After all the Samaritans have their own Temple, their own Bible and their own rituals. She was not interested.

Jesus however wants to make her an offer she cannot refuse and will want to accept. So Jesus catches her by surprise by offering her living water; living water that once she drinks from it she will never be thirsty again. For any of us who have ever had to carry water, this is quite an offer. Water weighs in at eight pounds per gallon. Now imagine having to carry four or five gallons of water every day from the well to your home. This woman is intrigued. If Jesus can give her living water, meaning fresh flowing water, that will make it so she does not have to carry this water every day, then she is all in. Needless to say Jesus is not offering actual thirst preventing living water. Living water is instead code language for something else. And we all know what code language is. It is words or phrases that mean far more than a simple reading would indicate...such as go blue or go green. Being from Texas I would have no idea what they meant...but you do...right? So when Jesus uses code language he means much more by it.

It is code language for a better world. Let me explain. The job of the messiah is to initiate a new and better world; a world in which enemies become friends, in which forgiveness is freely offered and accepted, in which everyone has enough. And in the Old Testament, Jesus' Bible, the term living water was used in this very way; to describe this better world. The prophet Zechariah refers to living water as that moment when peace comes to the world and everything is set to rights. So when Jesus offers her living water he is offering her entry into this better world.

The fact that Jesus is making such an offer should not surprise us because this is the kind of offer that God has always made. God is always inviting people into a better world. This is what is at the heart of Psalm 32. The writer is in a bad place. He has done something wrong; very, very wrong. He has committed some sin that is weighing heavily on him. It is eating away at him. He puts it this way. "While I kept my silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long...my strength was dried up as the heat of the summer." What he needed was confession and forgiveness. And that was exactly what God was offering. This is what the writer means by, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me." In a sense it is like God is trying to do a spiritual Heimlich maneuver, forcing the confession of sin out so the person can be healed. Finally the writer confesses his sin and is forgiven. God offers, the writer accepts and the Psalmist is healed. And because of that his life is changed.

Ultimately, I opened the envelope and accepted one of the positions listed on it. And accepting it changed my life. Ultimately the woman accepts Jesus' offer of living water. It took quite a bit of convincing but she too accepts...knowing that what Jesus is offering is not magic thirst-defying water, but entry into the better world. And it changed her life. We know this because she returns to her Samaritan village and claims to have found the messiah, yes even a Jewish messiah, who has become not her enemy but her friend...her savior. There was offer and acceptance.

The question becomes will we accept the offer that God is making to us? Will we accept the offer of being part of this better world? Will we accept and let it change our lives? And when I ask that question I am not talking about professing Jesus as Lord and Savior. I am speaking about being intentionally part of this new kingdom that God is creating through Christ. I am speaking about doing as well as believing, for that is what accepting is. I accepted the offer and moved overseas for two years. The Psalmist asked for and accepted the forgiveness that God offered. The woman went and told her friends about the messiah she had met. The question for us then is how do we concretely accept Jesus' offer? Do we go and make an enemy or a stranger into a friend? Do we invite someone to be part of this new and better world that Christ is creating? Do we forgive someone, or accept forgiveness for ourselves in such a way that they and we are changed?

God in Jesus is offering us entry into a better world. It is up to us to accept it. My challenge to you for this week is this, to ask, "How am I concretely accepting Jesus' offer of entry in such a way that I am part of "and" and not just "or.""