

June 2, 2020

Worship in spirit and truth

- Pastor Hank French

“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but [the Jews] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:19-20, 23-24).

Today’s text comes from the story of Jesus encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well in Samaria. It is a story with great meaning for us today in this time when our church buildings are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A bit of context. Samaritans and Jews detested each other. The Samaritans of Jesus day were descended from the intermarriages of Israelites with colonists from parts of Mesopotamia and Syria after Northern Israel had been conquered.

The Jews considered the Samaritans to eternally unclean because of their intermarriages with non-Jews. Samaritans were shunned and were not allowed to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, they worshipped in their own temple on Mount Gerizim which they believed was the only place for sacrifice and worship. Hence the Samaritan woman’s statement to Jesus that *“Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but [the Jews] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”* She wanted Jesus to tell her where the right place for worship was. He said neither of them.

The rites, rituals and regulations of both temples were not, according to Jesus, necessary for access to God. What God wanted was to be worshipped “in spirit and truth” and that could be done anywhere. No temple needed.

Our spirits, our souls are always with us, and God’s Spirit teaches our spirits the truth about God and the truth about how to live God’s way. As it says in Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is [the Holy] Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.... (8:15-16).

I will rejoice the day we can reopen the church and gather together in the sanctuary, the gathering space, and Stoltz Hall, but I also rejoice in, and am comforted by, the fact that we all have access to God together even when we are apart. As you have no doubt heard, the church building may be closed but the church is open; we are the church—when we worship in spirit and truth—no building needed to be close to each other and to God.

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for our church building; hasten the day we can re-enter it together for worship. But greater thanks for our people—the true church—who are together as we all worship together in spirit and truth. Amen.