Everyone needs a chance to meet Jesus

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Lent 4 A – Mothering Sunday. 1 Sam 16 1-13, Ps 23, Eph 5 8-14, Jn 9 1-41

For the third week in a row, we've read an extended story from John's Gospel. Each time, it's been a story of someone meeting Jesus. And for each of them, it's been a life-changing encounter: so important that they go and tell others about it. It's as if we can hear them say, *"I've met Jesus; he's changed my life, and no matter what people say, I will share this. Everyone needs a chance to meet Jesus, and I want to help them do just that."*

Two weeks ago, it was a powerful leader of the Jewish religious establishment; a man called Nicodemus. He visited Jesus secretly ***at midnight*** (Jn 3.1-17). Remember how baffled he was by Jesus? Jesus told Nicodemus that if he wanted to see the kingdom of God, he must be born again—born from above. Nicodemus didn't get it then, but later on, he *was* re-born. Later we'd see him abandon his prestige and security and become one of Jesus' disciples. (Jn 7 & 19)

Last week, it was a Samaritan woman. She met Jesus at Jacob's well. This meeting happened at mid***day***. As they talked, she came to see her own life through Jesus' eyes, and she was utterly transformed by the experience. She left her bucket at the well and hurried off to call everyone in her village to come and meet Jesus too.

Today, it's the turn of a man blind from birth. We just heard how Jesus gave him his sight. The religious authorities feared Jesus. So they said they'd expel this man from their faith

community unless he denounced Jesus as they did. But he refused to be walked over. And later, when he met Jesus again – and this second time, he could see him – he declared his belief in Jesus, and worshipped him.

So three people meet Jesus; three people who go out from that first meeting and tell others about Jesus—three people who try to help others meet Jesus – even when they're under pressure to reject him.

Nicodemus stuck up for Jesus in the face of his brother Pharisees [(Jn 7)]. The Samaritan woman ran back to her village and called everyone to meet Jesus [(Jn 4)]. And today, the man born blind willingly chooses the life of an outcast if that's what it will cost him to follow Jesus.

Each story challenges you and me to do the same – to say, *"I've met Jesus; he's changed my life, and no matter what people say, I will share this. Everyone needs a chance to meet Jesus, and I want to help them do just that."* Someone must have done that for *you* – someone who thought, *"I've met Jesus; he's changed my life, and no matter what people say, I will share this with you. Everyone needs a chance to meet Jesus, and I want to help you do just that."* And they made sure you did meet Jesus, just like *they* had.

It's really important that we do this too – that we get out and help people meet Jesus. Because people are shy. People who don't know Jesus won't necessarily come here and ask us to introduce them to Jesus.

That's also got something to do with the things people say and think about the followers of Jesus. We're variously called God botherers, flat-earthers and fanatics. It's taken for granted that we want to ram religion down innocent people's throats; it's assumed that followers of Jesus want to interfere with other people's personal relationships, and tell people who they can and can't love. Apparently we're obsessed. So why

would anyone bother to come here?

But we know Jesus wasn't moralistic or judgmental like that, and for the most part, neither are his followers. We follow his life-example – his way – not a set of rules. The way he gave us was love. And he taught that *way* mainly by example.

For the third week in a row now, we've gathered here and we've seen Jesus meet someone, and he *hasn't* judged them *or* forced scripture down their throats. He's given them his attention, his time, and his love, and he's invited them to grow into the best people they could be. Nothing was forced, but it turned their lives around.

We've seen his example: John gave us a ringside seat each time – really close – so we could actually feel the tension then the joy as his love prised open the shells of legalism and exclusion they'd lived with all their lives. *We* saw all this so we could learn to do the same; to give people attention, time, love, and an invitation.

People do live with extraordinary stresses: people carry terrible burdens. We know Jesus sets people free from the tyranny of those burdens. He's given *us* his gifts to offer, and his example of how it's done –as he did for Nicodemus, for the Samaritan woman at the well, and for this man born blind.

Jesus offered them relief from their pain and a chance to start afresh – to be reborn. It's happened for us. If we know all that, and we know lots of people struggle, will we consider inviting them to meet the real Jesus? The Samaritan woman did it after knowing Jesus for five minutes. The man born blind did it before he even knew what Jesus looked like.

They met Jesus, and they invited other people to get to know him. Can we consider that? Introduce people to him – or put another way, will we bring people's questions to the one we know has the time and attention and love to give them; bring them to the one who takes them seriously when they are crushed

by fear and loneliness; bring them to the one who will spend their whole life with them?

Let’s help these people meet this Jesus – the one we’ve got to know in recent weeks. Let’s help these people meet the real Jesus who has time for people – let’s help these people meet the Jesus who offers unconditional attention, time and love; who told Nicodemus he hadn’t come to judge people. Let’s help people meet this Jesus and let his love do it’s healing, freeing work in their lives.

“I’ve met Jesus; he’s changed my life, and no matter what people say, I will share this. Everyone needs a chance to meet Jesus, and I want to help them do just that.”

Amen