

## **THEME: The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus**

### ***“The Outcasts and the Poor”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton

March 16-17, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

#### **John 4:3-10**

*3 So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. 4 He had to go through Samaria on the way. 5 Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. 7 Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” 8 He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. 9 The woman was surprised, for Jews refused to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”*

*10 Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”*

**VIDEO      Sermon Starter – The Outcasts and the Poor**

**SLIDE      The Outcasts and the Poor**

It is said that a person is known by the company they keep. If that is true then we are going to learn a lot about Jesus today, because we are going to be focusing the sermon today on the company that Jesus kept. We are going to look at the people that he associated with and he called friends.

In this sermon series during the season of Lent, which is the 40 days and seven Sundays before we get Easter, we have been walking in the footsteps of Jesus. We have seen video footage and pictures of the holy land so we can see where Jesus walked. We have been looking at what these places tell us about who Jesus is and what it means for us to be his followers today. What does it look like for us to walk in his footsteps as we seek to be Jesus Christ to the world? There is a lot to learn today as we sweep through the Gospels to see the people that Jesus associated with and who his friends were so we can go out and do likewise.

I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a place for you to take notes and there are

pens and pencils in the pew pockets in front of you and I hope you will take some time to write anything down that you want to remember from today's message. If you are watching at home or online I invite you to take out a piece of paper and something to write with and then you can download this resource off our website later. If you feel like God is speaking to you through this message today I hope you will write those things down so you can think about it through the week.

You also will find daily Scripture readings and questions to think about throughout the week. I really want to encourage you during this season of Lent, which is the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, to make this a daily discipline. You are going to find that all of these stories that you are going to read this week tie back into today's message so please take it home and use it in the days ahead.

Many of the people that Jesus associated with during his earthly ministry were people that would have been called during his day:

**SLIDE      *Am ha'aretz* (הארץ עם) = "The people of the land"**

This is the Hebrew phrase that literally means, "the people of the land." You remember that the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for several hundred years before they came to the Promised Land. When they conquered the Promised Land, the people that still remained among the Canaanites were called, "the people of the land," or the *Am ha'aretz*. It really was a term that was meant to describe, "the others. They were not us they were the others."

More than 1000 years later, in the time of Jesus, it became a phrase that was used for people who were not like the beautiful or acceptable people. Everyone who is not considered quite acceptable or clean was considered to be part of the *Am ha'aretz*, or "the people of the land."

This included people who were less intelligent, and people who didn't know about the Scriptures or practice them the way that those who were regularly religious. They were seen as people who were unclean and sinful in their practices, as well as those who were not Jewish. This group was made up of sinners, outcasts and the extreme poor and these were the main people that Jesus hung out with during his public ministry. I think we will discover a great deal about Jesus and his heart by looking at his interaction with the *Am ha'aretz* and how he treated them.

Last week we spent some time in Luke 5 looking at the story where Jesus called his first disciples who were fishermen, Peter and Andrew, James and John.

You remember that he stepped into their boat in order to preach to the people on the shore and then he took them out fishing where they caught a miraculous load of fish. When they came back from that exciting experience, he invited them to come and follow him and he would make them fishers of people. Shortly after that we come to verse 27 in chapter 5 and so if you have your Bible's why don't you turn there as we begin to look at Jesus today. If you don't have your Bible's you can turn to Luke 5 in the Bibles in the pews in front of you.

Jesus is walking by himself in this story and he comes to a tax collector's booth. Remember that in the first century taxes were paid to the Romans. There was a head tax for each person and each family member. There were taxes on property and there was a tax paid on transporting goods that you were going to sell. If you were a fisherman and you were going to take your fish to market then you went past the toll booth and you paid the tax collector a certain amount of money on each fish you caught. You also would pay tax on the grain or olive oil or whatever else that you produced and would sell to others.

A major highway ran past Capernaum which is a seaside village that Jesus called his home base and on that road was a booth with a tax collector in it whose name was Levi, also known as Matthew. Jesus says to Levi, "Come and follow me." Levi left his tax collecting booth and he went to follow Jesus.

There are several reasons why this story is profound in helping us to understand Jesus. First, let's remember that the tax collectors work for the Romans. As a tax collector you would buy a region in which to collect taxes. You would bid against others to buy the right to collect taxes on the road or in a certain area. You would then have to pay the Romans upfront the taxes that you thought you could collect during the year from that region. Let's say you gave them \$5000 to collect the taxes on this road near Capernaum. Your job during the year would be to collect more than \$5000 worth of taxes so you could make some money. The more taxes you collected, then the more money that you made and the better off you would be financially.

If you were a person that were paying taxes and you knew that this person was trying to get as much out of you as possible then how would you feel about them? It didn't seem like a particularly fair way to collect taxes and tax collectors were known as being greedy and taking as much as they could, especially from those who were poor and could not protest. You see the tax collectors also had Roman soldiers they could use at their disposal.

In the eyes of most faithful Jewish citizens, if you work as a tax collector for the Romans then you were stealing from the people. If you happened to be Jewish and be a tax collector then you would automatically be placed in the category of *Am ha'aretz* by virtue of being a traitor to your own people.

Jesus comes to the tax collecting booth of Levi who has already paid for the right to collect taxes for the entire year and looks at him and says, "Leave this behind, come and follow me." People around Jesus who were good and faithful Jews would have been shocked by this act, that Jesus would call one of these men to be his disciple. The only way I can think of to put this in a contemporary context is to imagine that I knew one of the persons who deals drugs to high school students along the River trail. Imagine that I came to this person I said, "I think you would be a good Associate Pastor at First United Methodist Church. Would you come and join our staff?"

Then imagine that I stood up in front of you one weekend and told you how this person had great business sense and good customer relation skills in his previous business and so I have asked him to be our pastor. You all would think I had lost my mind! Jesus comes to this man who is a notorious sinner in the eyes of some people and he says, "I want you to be one of my 12 disciples." What does that tell you about Jesus? What does that tell you about his heart and how he sees people?

Levi agrees to leave his tax collecting booth and then he tells Jesus, "I would like to have a party and banquet in your honor tonight at my house. I would like to invite all my friends as well." Who do you think are friends of the tax collectors? It most likely is all the other *Am ha'aretz*, the people of the land who are the prostitutes, the other sinners and those who are considered second-class with low class or no class.

Jesus accepts and he goes to the house of Levi that night and Levi invited all of his other friends. The gospel of Luke tells us that he holds a "great" banquet that is not just a simple meal but a large festivity at which Jesus comes to eat. In the first century, just like today in many ways, the way you would befriend someone is to ask them to come and eat at your house so you could spend some time together. When you would break bread with someone that means that you are bound together and connected through that meal.

The reality is that good Jewish people didn't eat at the table with *Am ha'aretz*. You weren't sure if they washed their hands before they prepared the food. You could get sick if you ate food at someone's table and they had not properly cleaned before they made a meal. There was a social awkwardness as you ate with someone from a different class than yourself who was considered low in the eyes of others. Finally, there was this sense that if you ate with those people that you now put yourself in their class and you would no longer be welcome at good Jewish homes.

Into this setting we find Jesus, the Savior of the world and the King of the universe, God's only son, choosing to eat with the *Am ha'aretz*. He eats that night with them and he has no words of condemnation for those who have gathered to eat with him and Matthew. He is telling them stories about God and what God is really like and how God loves those who are lost and broken and feel like they don't fit in.

Then, when the supper was over, do you remember what the religious people said to him. They asked him a simple question.

**SLIDE**      ***30 But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with such scum?"***

I love that translation, "Why do you eat with scum?" Maybe you remember the response of Jesus to tax collectors. It paints a picture for us of who Jesus hangs out with and what he came to do in the world and what the Kingdom of God looks like. Remember two weeks ago we talked about how Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God which was in our midst and everything he does is meant to point to what that Kingdom looks like. Jesus gives us a picture of that when he says these words.

**SLIDE**      ***31 Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. 32 I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."***

Jesus was really pointing to the fact that all of them and all of us struggle with a sickness, especially those of us who get to judging other people. The difference between the tax collectors, the *Am ha'aretz*, and the righteous people

was that the sinners and tax collectors recognize their need for grace whereas the righteous ones were blind to what Jesus Christ was offering.

In Luke 7 Jesus goes to eat at the home of the Pharisee. He will eat with anybody who invites him and so he goes to the home of a religious leader. Pharisees were pious and they were interested in religious purity. The word Pharisee literally means, "separated one."

**SLIDE          Pharisee = "Separated one"**

This means that they separated themselves from the *Am ha'aretz* who were the people of the land and considered uncouth.

You might remember that when Jesus goes to eat at the house of the Pharisee there is a prostitute who shows up for dinner. This is shocking as a prostitute shows up at the home of the pastor's house while he is serving a dinner with the most famous Rabbi in the region. She comes and stands at the feet of Jesus and she begins to sob. We don't know why she is sobbing so we have to use our imagination. Is it possible that earlier in the day she had met Jesus for the first time and for the first time a man looked into her eyes and her soul and said, "I love you and God loves you. You matter to God and you are somebody. I see you."

We don't know but I imagine it was something like that, that caused her to come to Jesus that night. She weeps at the feet of Jesus and all the Pharisee's can think about the entire time is how angry he is that such a scandalous thing would happen in his home. All he is thinking is, "Who is this woman that she can come into my home? She's the town prostitute and she has no business being here. Why doesn't Jesus scold her and send her away?"

Jesus looks at Simon the Pharisee, the religious man who is meant to be an example to others, and he says, "Simon, do you even see her? I know you see what she does. I know you see her past. But do you see her? Do you see that she is a child of some woman and some man who probably pray for their daughter every day of her life? Do you see that she is a child of God? Do not see what she has been but instead see what she could be? Do you see her sobbing? Do you even wonder why she's crying? Or can all you think about is how you are embarrassed that she is come to your house and that she actually knows the way and how to get here and where the entrances is?"

Then Jesus turned to her and says these words.

**SLIDE**        ***“Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”***

What does that story tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about the heart of Jesus and the people that he associates with? We see the same idea about Jesus lifted up in Luke 15 when we read these words.

**SLIDE**        **1 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. 2 This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!**

This happens to us today as religious people sometimes. We find religion and we realize our need for grace, but over time we struggle with the tendency to judge other people who haven't yet found religion. Our religious instincts become a source of our own sin and our sin is even worse than the ones we committed before because before they least were obvious. Now, they are more like the pine beetle which has begun boring into the trees in the Rocky Mountains and over time they destroy the trees from the inside out. At first you can't even see them, but they are destroying ministries until one day the trees turn brown and eventually they fall over.

Our pride and judgmental-ism and arrogance acts in the same way and Jesus recognizes this. This is why he continues in Luke 15 to tell three different stories about lost things. Do you remember those stories? Their story is that everybody who is a follower of Jesus should read and probably try to remember on a regular basis.

Jesus starts by telling them about a Shepherd with 100 sheep and one of them wandered away. Does he not leave the 99 so he can go find that one lost sheep and bring a back home? A woman loses a coin and she searches all day to find because it is so valuable to her. A man loses a son, who goes off on his own into the world and makes mistakes, but the father waits and longs for the boy to come home and when he does he throws a party. Jesus tells us that this is what God is like. He cares about those who are lost.

I preach these stories on many occasions because they are the stories that have helped me to fall in love with Jesus Christ. They are the stories which have shaped our ministry together as a church and they should always be stories that we remember and recount. They should be defining stories for us about Jesus because they give us a picture of his heart for people.

## **SLIDE      What does it mean to be holy and righteous?**

One of the dominant pictures of God held by religious leaders in the first century was that God is holy. God is righteous and God hates sin. Since we know these things about God we should separate ourselves as much as possible from sin and from those who are sinful. That all made sense for those in the first century and you can find Scriptures which tied in to that in which spoke to that reality.

But Jesus walked into that kind of a world and he said that there is another picture for God that he would like to show us. He challenged what it really meant to be holy and righteous by painting a different picture of God. It's not that God is holy or righteous. It's not that God likes sin. Jesus just wanted to show us a different picture of what holiness and righteousness could look like by painting a different picture.

The picture that Jesus painted was of a God who saw his children straying from the path of holiness and loved them so much that what he wanted most was for them to come home. There was nothing that could separate them from his love and so he was persistently trying to draw them back into a relationship with him. He told us that it was kind of like those of us who have children who do things that we wish they wouldn't do.

If you are a parent this will happen at some point your life. When our children are teenagers what they want to do most is differentiate themselves from their parents to define their own identity. If your parents are faithful followers of Jesus and they go to church then how do you rebel against them and try to define your own identity? You decide you don't believe in God and you are not going to do the things that you learned in church. Some of us have a mild case of this but often times we come to a place where we are not sure if we believe and we struggle. We do things that make our parents cry and as parents we cry when our children do things that disappoint us.

When our children do these things do we say to them, "I hate the things that you do and I'm not going to talk to you until you stop doing them"? Do we push them away from us because we don't want to be near that kind of behavior?

Or do we seek to love them all the more those moments when they are certain they believe the things that we believe? The most important gift that we can give our children is grace and sometimes the most powerful way we can do



that is simply to pray for them. I pray for both of my children every night, even if they have done something that has annoyed me. It's more important than anything else to me that my children know the love of God and I want that love to define their lives. I want them to walk with God all of their days, but sometimes they walk away.

I want my children to know clearly however, that even if they walk away I will still love. I want them to know, "I love you. Even though you are walking away from faith or doing something I have asked you not to do and I'm disappointed, I will always love you. There is nothing that can keep me from loving you as your father."

I think that's the picture that Jesus is trying to give to those who feel like the *Am ha'aretz*. He is saying, "Your Father loves you and he wants you back."

What's your picture of God? If Jesus goes out of his way to reach out to those who are considered sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes, what does that tell us as we seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world? What does it mean to walk in the footsteps of this Savior today?

What the problem for us is that the longer we are Christians the more that most of our friends are Christians. We no longer cultivate relationships with people who aren't Christians and we become insulated. Seeing this picture of Jesus reminds us that we are to build relationships with people who feel outside the church. We are meant to do this not simply to invite them to church, although that conversation should come up at some point. Hopefully somewhere along the way you can say something like, "You know, one of the things that is really important to me is my faith. Do you want to come to church with me sometime or perhaps on Easter Sunday?"

But even before we invite anyone to church it is about loving people because God loves people. It is about being a friend when people feel like they have no friends. One of my friends who is a United Methodist pastor lost his father when he was 11 years old. His father was a firefighter and he did not know Christ when he died. He serves in smaller towns on the Eastern Plains of Colorado and in every community volunteers to be a firefighter. He rides on the back of trucks and he gets to know each of the persons in the fire department as a friend. He sees his first task as just to be their friend but he also invites them at some point into a relationship with Jesus Christ and many firefighters have given their

life to Christ because of his friendship. I actually met one of those firefighters because they came to Annual Conference with him a few years ago, which is the yearly gathering of United Methodists from the Colorado, Utah and Wyoming area. This man told me about how his whole family now has become Christians and his wife and children now bring kids to church on a regular basis who would've never heard about Christ. All of that has come from one person reaching out a hand of friendship.

Let me ask you again this question. Are you following in the footsteps of Jesus? Are you being friends the people who may not yet know him, just to be their friends, and then in the process of doing that allowing them to see the light of Christ shining through you? That's what it means to follow Jesus and to walk in his footsteps.

### **SLIDE        The Outcasts**

The second category of people that Jesus reached out to who were known as the *Am ha'aretz* were the outcasts. They were outcasts because they didn't fit in and often times that was because they were physically ill, that was seen as making them unclean. This meant they had to live outside of town and you didn't touch them because they were the Untouchables. Sometimes they were outcasts because they didn't fit in to the culture.

One of the groups within this group was the lepers. Leprosy in the day of Jesus was probably not Hansen's disease, which is what we would call it today, but it probably was more common ailments like psoriasis and eczema and ringworm and sometimes open sores which wouldn't heal. All of these diseases were considered highly infectious and you were considered ceremonially unclean. Because they were infectious, the law of Moses prescribed that you had to live outside of town. You could not live in your home anymore and you had to live outside the walls of the city so you wouldn't contaminate someone. You did this until you were declared clean by a priest because you had been healed. Some people were never healed and so they lived outside of town for the rest of their lives.

The law prescribed that if you had one of these diseases and you were walking on the road and you were unclean, even though your hands and arms were covered up, you had to cover your mouth with the cloak and you had to say, "I am unclean. Stay away. I am unclean. Stay away."

Can you imagine what life would've been like for someone like this? What would be like if no one could touch you or hold you or how you? What if there was no one you could eat with? These were the lepers and we read about them and Jesus interacting with them in Luke chapter 5.

**SLIDE**      ***12 In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. "Lord," he said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean." 13 Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared.***

First, notice that Jesus reached out and touched the man. He didn't have to do that and he had healed many times without touching people. What does that story tell you about who Jesus associated with? What does it tell you about the heart of Jesus? It begs the question.

**SLIDE**      **Who are the Untouchables in our lives today?**

I was thinking about this in my own life and I remember an experience when I worked downtown in Denver in a place called Central Denver Community Services. I worked there in my first year of seminary in field placement and I was doing intake at the shelter one night and there is a man who had not had a bath in a very long time. As I wrote down his name and took down his information so he could spend the night the shelter he began to cry. My natural inclination is to hug people when they are hurting like that, but I backed off a bit. One of the regular volunteers could see my hesitation and she stepped in front of me and put her arm around the man and gave him a big hug.

As I watched her embracing him I imagined that is what Jesus was like. That woman taught me a lot that day and helped me to work up the courage to reach out and put my arms around those that it might be difficult to hug. Jesus isn't thinking about how my clothes might smell when I'm done or how quickly I can get into the shower later. He's thinking, "Here's a guy who desperately needs to know that somebody will touch him and love him."

Who are the Untouchables for you? Who are the people that you are afraid to reach out to in touch? Jesus models for us how this works.

Another group of people that were pushed into the outskirts of society during the first century were the Samaritans. Some of us might wonder who

Samaritans are because even though we have heard of things like the Good Samaritan law and the story of the Good Samaritan we don't always understand where those phrases come from.

**VIDEO      Map of Samaria and Sychar**

On the video screen you will see a map of the holy land. You also have one in your bulletin because it is easier to read. The holy land is divided into three sections. The northern section is an area called the Galilee and this is where Jesus set up his home base in the town of Capernaum on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. The center section of the country is known as Samaria. This is where the Samaritans lived and they worshiped on Mount Gerizim. Today this region is known as the West Bank and is where the Palestinians live. There are a lot of parallels between the Palestinians and the Samaritans. Finally in the south you had Judea which is where we find the Dead Sea and Jerusalem in the place of the baptism of Jesus where we started this sermon series.

**SLIDE      Map of Samaria (picture)**

Jews in the first century despised Samaritan's so much and hated Samaria, so if they had to travel from one end of the country to the other they would literally cross the Jordan River in East and go up this region known as Perea and then cross back over the Jordan River when they got to their destination in the North or the South. This was the kind of animosity that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews.

In 722 BC Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom called Israel with the 10 tribes and the southern kingdom called Judah which had 2 tribes. The Assyrian Empire which is made of modern-day Iraq and western Iran sent their troops and invaded the North kingdom and crushed them. They carried the 10 northern tribes away into slavery. They scattered them throughout the Assyrian Empire, forcibly relocating them and having them intermarry with the people of Assyria. They lost their culture and their identity. The 10 northern tribes we call the lost tribes of Israel because they were lost during that period.

Some of those people remained in the holy land in Israel. The experience forcibly relocated people from other parts of the Empire to the northern kingdom of Israel. These people intermarried and they became known as the Samaritans. The Jewish people consider them "half breeds" and while Samaritans might've looked like everyone else in their land they were seen as different. They

embraced the Israelite faith but they also made some changes and modifications based on the part of the Assyrian Empire they came from. They were also then considered unorthodox and later many of them were called heretics. So for several hundred years before the birth of Jesus there was bad blood between those who were Jewish and those who were Samaritans. There was pain and conflict and war between them for hundreds of years.

Jesus comes into the picture and instead of passing around Samaria you will notice in our Scripture passage today that Jesus passed directly through Samaria. He didn't have to go through Samaria but he chose to go through this region. It was his heart that took him into Samaria instead of taking the extra three days and traveling around.

**VIDEO      Modern Day Samaritan (first part of video there is no audio)**

There are still modern-day Samaritans. At the time of Jesus there may have been two or 3 million Samaritans but today there are 750 left. The last 2000 years they have been slaughtered in war and violence against their people. Very few Christians have met modern-day Samaritans but I thought you might like to see an interview with one of them on Mount Gerizim which is their holy mountain. Take a listen.

**SLIDE      Mt Gerizim (picture)**

You see a picture of Mount Gerizim on the video screen where this video footage we shot and what is important to remember is that the Samaritans were considered the *Am ha'aretz* in the day of Jesus. They were second-class and despised and Jesus befriended them. He passed through Samaria when many Jews would not have done so.

Did you notice how that priest described their worship? We get a little antsy after an hour and 15 min. of worship but they worship for seven hours every weekend. They worshiped together every Friday night and they observe all the laws in the first five books of the Bible. They get up at two in the morning and show up at the synagogue on Saturday for their Sabbath. They gather for four hours of prayer and then they go home and sleep for two hours and then they wake up and study the Bible as a family. At the end of the day, just before sunset, they gather in worship again in their homes. They slaughter the Passover lamb at the top of this mountain on the video screen, Mount Gerizim, for the Passover meal.

## SLIDE      **Week 5 Map Zoomed In**

In our Scripture story before us today we find that Jesus comes to Sychar, which is modern-day Nablus in the West Bank. When Jesus arrived he sends his disciples into town to get food, but he stays at the well. There was one water source for that town and Jesus had there as opposed to joining his disciples in town. Why is Jesus staying by himself? He knows that there is a Samaritan woman who comes to this place every day at noon and he is waiting for her because he has a divine appointment.

Why is Jesus doing this at noon? The women normally come to the well in the morning and they fellowship together and this allows them to not only have some social interaction but they can get back to their homes before it is hot in the middle of the day. If a woman came at noon then she was coming by herself because she was a woman who was not accepted by her own peers. This is a woman who was an outcast among her own people. She was an *Am ha'aretz* among the *Am ha'aretz*.

This woman shows up and Jesus asks her for a drink and you will notice that in the next sentence we have a statement in the Scripture that tells us that the woman was surprised because Jews didn't interact with Samaritans. Think back to our own country in the 1960s when there were separate drinking fountains and restrooms and entrances for people depending on the color of their skin. It was the same way for the Jews and the Samaritans. Jews wouldn't drink after a Samaritan and so this woman would not dare touch a cup and then handed it to Jesus who was a Rabbi. That was unacceptable in the day of Jesus, except that Jesus asked her for a drink.

Jesus then offers her living water and he reveals to her that he is the Messiah. He doesn't care that she has been married several times or that she is now living with a man who was not her husband, he simply offers her living water and then he invites her to go back to her people and become the first missionary to the Samaritans. Once more Jesus has called somebody strange to be a missionary and to be his disciple. The reason she was considered second-class among our own second-class people is because she had been married several times and now she was living with a man who was not her husband. In that day was quite scandalous to be a woman in that position. Women didn't typically divorce men but men divorced women and so five times men had rejected her and now she was living with a man who refused to even cover her with the social

protection of marriage. The woman in her town talked about her and did not welcome her.

Jesus waits for this woman and he loves her and he calls her to be his disciple. I'm sure that you get the picture and it is a powerful one about the kind of people Jesus hung out with and the kind of people he called to follow him.

**VIDEO      Sychar and Jacobs Well**

On the video screen you will see some footage of the church in modern day Nablus which used to be Sychar. It is built over the top of Jacob's Well which is the place where Jesus met this woman some 2000 years ago. The church is built on top of the water source and as you go inside this woman's story is remembered because this church was built in her honor. You have to go down into the ground to get to the well because the ground level has risen due to all of the conflicts in this area. Underneath the church you will come to a little room with this well and about hundred and 50 feet down is the well that this woman would've taken water from to give to Jesus to drink. This is the icon for that church which remembers this Samaritan woman and her interaction with Jesus.

**SLIDE      Samaritan Woman Icon (picture)**

This story reminds us about how Jesus cares about the outcasts and the nobody's that no one else will notice or even interact with. If Jesus did that and we are going to follow in his footsteps today then this has to be the kind of people that we strive to be as we seek to be Jesus Christ to the world here at First United Methodist Church. That we learn about Jesus as we travel to Samaria.

The last of the *Am ha'aretz* I want to mention are the poor. There was an idea in the first century that if you are poor it was because you deserved it for some reason. Maybe people saw you as lazy or maybe it was because of some sin you committed. Jesus disrupted that prevailing viewpoint in society. You recognize that was good to help people move out of poverty and self-sufficiency, but somewhere along the way it takes somebody to lend a hand and not to somebody who walks by and ignores the needs of those who have nothing.

The very first sermon that Jesus preached in his hometown of Nazareth comes from the book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.

**SLIDE      *"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."***

Jesus goes on to tell parables and stories about those who were poor and how they experience the Kingdom of God. He heals those who are sick, most of whom are among the poor. He ministers to them and he eats with them and he feeds them as a way of reaching out and saying that this is what the Kingdom of God looks like and what it looks like to be citizens of that Kingdom. If we are going to follow Jesus it means that we must somehow be engaged with the poor and not just walk past them or act like they are invisible.

Jesus tells several stories about how important it is to care about the poor. One of them happens in Matthew's Gospel as he talking about the Last Judgment when Jesus Christ will return. Jesus will gather all the nations before him as a Shepherd separates the sheep and the goats. The goats he will dismiss and send away but the sheep he will invite into his Father's Kingdom. He tells us the criteria that will be used on that day. "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was naked and you gave me something to wear. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was sick and in prison and you visited me. For in is much as you have done this to the least of these, you have done it unto me. As much as you have failed to do it to the least of these, you have failed to do it unto me."

He also tells us a parable about Lazarus who was sick and had such bad ailments that the dogs would come and lick his sores. He was unable to work and so he begged outside of a gated subdivision that had covenants and didn't let in any undesirables. He would wait there and hope for people to come by who had money and they would give him something so he could eat. There was a rich man who stepped over Lazarus every day and never stopped to help.

A day came when Lazarus died and not long after that the rich man died. Lazarus was seen in the bosom of Abraham, being comforted in heaven. The rich man found himself standing among the flames, looking across a great gulf where he could see the man who used to be poor now standing with Abraham. He cried out, "Abraham, please help me!"

Abraham said, "Son, don't you realize that you had everything you could ever want in your worldly life and you kept stepping over this man and never stopped to help. He had nothing and was covered with sores and you ignored him. Now he is receiving what is owed to him and he is being comforted because of the suffering that he experienced. But I can't do anything for you at this point."



The point that Jesus was making is that those of us who have been blessed with so much must recognize that we are blessed to be a blessing. When much is given to us then much is expected and Jesus models it for us in his life and in his teachings. This is why we give you opportunities throughout the year to serve the poor. We invite you to do that either within this church or somewhere in the community because we want you to know that this is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and to follow in his footsteps.

Last year, more than 200 of you went on mission trips and more than 300 of you served in our "Love out Loud" weekend where we served throughout the community. Most of you pay your own way to go on these trips and to serve in these places so you can come alongside of those who are hurting and seek to bless them and then be blessed by them.

We have a staff person here whose main job is to get you connected with a way to serve the poor. Jake Forsythe is our director of equipping in missions and his e-mail is in the bulletin this week, or you can call the office and leave a message. You can also go online to our website and click on the Get Involved tab and see a list of mission opportunities and places you can serve. We try to make it as easy as possible for you to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Today we have a great opportunity to hear about what it's like to be in ministry with those who are among the poorest of the poor. Thomas Agutu has become a good friend of many of us here at First United Methodist Church because he helps coordinate all of our transportation and ministry when we are in Kenya for our mission trips. Thomas is here in the United States and he's been with us this weekend and I want to invite him to come up and to share with us a bit of the ministry that he is a part of among the poor.

**SLIDE      Talitha Koum Exterior**

As Thomas comes up to join me, you will see on the video screen Talitha Koum which is the girl's dorm you have helped build in Spring Valley, a slum area in Kenya which we been a part of. 20,000 people live in one square mile in this community and over the past two Christmas Eve's you have given part of your offering to help build this building which is now completed. This will house 200 girls and you're giving not only built the building but also provided the interior so we thought we'd show you some pictures of that.

**SLIDE      Talitha Koum Beds**

- SLIDE      Talitha Koum Beds 2**
- SLIDE      Talitha Koum Alice**
- SLIDE      Talitha Koum Cupboards**
- SLIDE      Talitha Koum Pastor Stanley**
- SLIDE      Talitha Koum Girls**

The name “Talitha Koum” comes from the story of Jesus healing a young girl in Luke’s gospel where he says these words which mean, “get up little girl...stand up and walk!”

Interview with Thomas:

- Tell us about how you have been involved with the poor?
- Why do you think Jesus cared about the poor?
- Why should we care about the poor?
- Anything else you want to tell share with us?

What are you willing to do to reach out to the poor? This is part of God came in your life. This is what it means to follow Jesus—to love sinners, to touch the outcasts and Untouchables, and to be engaged in ministry with the poor.

**SLIDE      Prayer**

I would like you to put your hands on your lap with your palms up as we go to God in prayer. This is a position where you were offering yourself to God. If you are watching online or listening to the podcast then you can do it yourself as well. I would invite you to bow your heads with me in prayer and say these words silently and your breath.

*Here I am Lord, use me. I offer myself to you. Help me to befriend those who feel broken beyond repair, to love the outcasts and to serve the poor.*

*Here I am Lord, send me, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

# “The Outcasts and the Poor”

## Theme: The Way: Walking In the Footsteps of Jesus

Scripture: John 4:3-10

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

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**Meditation Moments for Monday, March 18** – Read Luke 5:12-16 – The words, “Jesus reached out his hand, and touched him” may not seem odd, but it was a stunning act. In Jesus’ day most skin diseases were lumped together as “leprosy.” Leviticus 13-14 called for isolating those who had any skin disease so they would not spread. Most people felt fear and revulsion and avoided all contact with them. But Jesus touched the man and said, “I am willing (to touch you.) Be healed!”

- Today we know more about leprosy and other skin diseases. “Lepers” don’t wear signs that say “unclean,” but social shunning still goes on in 2012. We shun people based on race, age, gender, socio-economic or educational level, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, even personal quirks, political beliefs, or looks. Have you ever been shunned? Have you shunned someone else? How is God asking you to live up to Jesus’ example in touching the leper today?
- Jesus sent the man to follow the ritual from Leviticus 14 for being declared clean so he would be able to rejoin his community. Limited as it seems to us, that was the best equivalent then of a clean medical bill of health. In what ways does God’s power work in and through the medical, counseling and other professions today? How can human wisdom work with, rather than against, God’s healing power?

**Prayer:** *Picture this man—worn down by illness and isolation and feeling untouchable. As you pray, see yourself as the person pleading, “Lord, if you want, you can ...” See Jesus reaching out to you, feel his touch, hear him say, “I do want to ...”*

**Tuesday, March 19** – Read Luke 17:11-19 – We again see the isolated experienced by those with leprosy. They raised their voices and called to Jesus from a distance. Their isolation may have broken down ethnic barriers—at least one was a Samaritan, but the story’s setting (verse 11) hints that some of the lepers were Jewish. Jesus certainly broke down those barriers—he healed them all, and welcomed the Samaritan who offered thanks.

- Jesus’ command to, “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” was the way people were declared clean. But it preceded the actual cleansing. When they acted on Jesus’ word, they apparently opened the way for his power to flow. In what ways does this speak to you? In what part of life might you need to act on God’s wishes, rather than waiting for him to make everything right before you act?
- All ten were “cleansed,” but when the Samaritan came back to say “thank you,” Jesus used a strong phrase saying, “Your faith has healed you.” Pastor Bruce Larsen wrote, “The other nine were merely cleansed. If ingratitude is more deadly than leprosy, they were in worse shape than before. Only one came back and was made whole.” What blocks gratitude in your life? What helps you remember to thank God every day?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you so often do good things in my life; I so often take them for granted. Make my heart whole, so that I can live a life of wonder, gratitude and praise. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 20** – Read John 4:3-26 – Verse 3 tells us Jesus, “had to go through Samaria.” Pastor Roger Frederickson notes that, “Jesus did not need to save the three days he could gain by passing through this hostile province rather than

crossing the river and going up the eastern desert route. There did not seem to be urgent needs in Galilee ... He knew the ... spiritual hunger of the Samaritan people, and the Father had sent Him into the whole world—not just part of it. He could not avoid these people in spite of the long history of resentment and antagonism between Jews and Samaritans.”

- Jesus sat down to rest by Jacob’s well. A lone woman, an outcast even among the Samaritans, came to the well and saw a Jewish rabbi there. Trace how Jesus turned this awkward encounter into a life-changing conversation. How did Jesus disarm suspicion and fear? At what points was he straightforward and direct? Who are the people “at the well” that you’re not sure how to approach about Jesus?
- The woman tried to keep the conversation abstract and impersonal, especially in verse 20. But Jesus would not be side-tracked—he kept reaching for her heart. What issues or questions function at times to help you keep God “at a distance”? How do you keep the topic of God an interesting subject for study and discussion rather than experience a life-changing Savior and Lord?

**Prayer:** *O Lord, you want my heart and my hands as well as my mind. I want to give up my wariness, and surrender myself to your persistent, searching love. Amen.*

**Thursday, March 21 – Read John 4:27-42** – The effects of Jesus’ talk with the woman at the well reached far beyond her life. She dashed into town, told everyone about her visit and asked, “Could this man be the Christ?” Then Jesus taught his disciples, who seemed to think no sharing could do any good in this hostile territory, an important lesson about spiritual vision. “Open your eyes,” he said, “and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest.”

- If the assignment is to reach out to a hostile area with the good news of God’s love, what kind of person would you choose for the task? Jesus chose a friendless, outcast woman, who was effective mainly by saying, “Come and see.” Do you allow your limitations to block you from sharing what Christ means to you? Consider the woman at the well, and ask God in what ways you can be a channel of Christ’s love today.
- The townspeople came and listened to Jesus. In the end they said, “We have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world.” How can you hear the voice of Jesus for yourself today? What spiritual practices (including but not limited to reading the Meditation Moments) help you “hear for yourself” Christ’s call on your life?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, give me ears to hear your word to me, and eyes wide open and alert to see when other hearts are ripe to hear about your saving love. Amen.*

**Friday, March 22 – Read Matthew 9:9-13** – Israelites saw those in their country who collected Roman taxes as traitors and outcasts. Rome’s laws let them get rich by overcharging people. But Jesus didn’t see Matthew as an outcast—he saw one of his “sheep” in need of his inclusive love (Luke 15:1-7). He called Matthew to, “follow me.” Matthew left his predatory work and wealth behind to follow Jesus. The Pharisees were incensed, but Jesus said they failed to grasp that God is, above all, a God of mercy and grace.

- Who do you identify with in this passage? The outcast Matthew? The judgmental Pharisees? The merciful, gracious Jesus? Perhaps at times all three? How can you grow in your ability to see people not through the filters of judgment, prejudice and fear, but through the loving, merciful eyes of Jesus?
- We are called to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world and to love and serve in his name (Romans 12:3-18). Here at FUMC there are many ways to serve the world in his name. You can check out the “Get Involved” tab at the top of our web page to review many of them [www.fumcdurango.org](http://www.fumcdurango.org). In what specific way(s) will you choose to be the loving, grace-filled hands and feet of Jesus?

**Prayer:** *Loving Lord, help me to see others through your eyes, and to love and serve all in your name. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 23 – Read Luke 19:1-10** – Zacchaeus was “a ruler among tax collectors” and an outcast. He went to great lengths to see Jesus, climbing up a sycamore tree to get a better view because he was so short. Jesus very publicly said, “Zacchaeus, come down—I must stay in your home today.” Jesus bucked general social rules by inviting himself into a personal relationship with this outcast. To those who grumbled, he said that he “came to seek and save the lost.” It is interesting that Zacchaeus sought Jesus, only to find that Jesus was seeking him! In Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus we see a change of heart. Suddenly the value God places on people became more important to him than the “stuff” he had accumulated.

- It’s been said Jesus came to, “comfort to the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Where are you on this spectrum? Ask God to open your eyes to your need of Christ in your life as Lord and Savior. Ask for courage to accept Christ’s offer to “stay in your home today,” freeing you from reliance on external riches to make room for the inner riches only Christ can give you.

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank you that even as I seek you, you have been seeking me. When I feel “outcast,” remind me that I’m an “insider” with you. May I never allow anything else get in the way of loving and serving you. Amen.*

**Family Activity:** The Bible tells us that God is love. God shared His love with us by sending Jesus to Earth. Jesus loves and cares for all people everywhere, including those who are hurting, lonely or in need. This Lenten season, be aware of people in need of Jesus' love. Invite a lonely neighbor over for a simple dinner or dessert. Listen to an older couple or person share their stories about life and faith. Bring school supplies or food to children who are under-resourced. Serve a meal at a homeless shelter or visit a nursing home. Build relationships with those of different generations, ethnicities and backgrounds. Share the love of Jesus this season and always.