

## **Background for Scriptures 3-16-14**

### **Tensions between the Samaritans and the Judeans**

Under the reigns of King David and his son, King Solomon, the tensions that had existed within the country of Israel going back centuries were held together by these strong rulers. After Solomon died, however, the United Kingdom split into two: northern Israel with its capital Samaria and southern Judea with its capital Jerusalem.

Judah saw northern Israel as a sinful kingdom, punished by being destroyed by the Assyrians in 720 BC. Samaritans in the north, however, claimed that they were the true Israel. They worshiped in their own temple on Mount Gerizim and claimed that it was the original sanctuary, not the temple in Jerusalem in the southern kingdom.

It was a case of ‘my church is better than your church.’

Both Jewish and Samaritan religious leaders at the time of Jesus taught that it was wrong to have any contact with the opposite group, and neither was to enter each other's territories or even to speak to one another. Throughout the first half of the first century in our era, many violent confrontations between Jews and Samaritans occurred.

----- About tax collectors,

...there were Jews who worked for Rome collecting the outrageous taxes of the oppressing power from their own people. They were known to overcharge the Jewish peasants and they were despised as traitors and sinners.

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### **Luke 9: 51-56 A Samaritan Village Refuses to Receive Jesus**

<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then<sup>[b]</sup> they went on to another village.

Luke 19: 1-9 **Jesus and Zacchaeus**

**19** <sup>1</sup> Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup> A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup> All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

SERMON:

## **“Whose Tribe Are You In? Who’s In Your Tribe?”**

I don't know that I would have hastened to stand in line when Jesus invited women and men to be his students. I would like to think I would have, but when I read his outrageous and abrasive words, which is how they would have been heard, I am not sure I would have embraced his program. I would have seen him schmoozing with people I might not have liked, treating them with the same courtesy with which he honored people whom I thought were good people. I think I would have been very confused.

I think I would also have been cautious because I sensed something: that if I had hung around and gotten Jesus' attention, he would have nailed me. He would have asked me to release my judgments and opinions about others (and myself!) and to expand my tribe...the people I allow into my home, the people I have chosen to trust. He chatted with Samaritans to the shock of his disciples. During his speed demon 3-year ministry, he was non-stop, from what the gospels show us. Jesus asked whoever would listen to him to risk their comfort level over and over again. Because he could somehow see that we limit our joy by limiting who has access to us.

He certainly didn't allow himself to get comfortable once his ministry took off. He would go from a town where he had been accepted and received and perhaps relaxed a little and then travel on to the next town. Kind of like a series of cold calling. He asked a lot of people into his Life Training Program

but didn't have a lot of takers because he would say things like, "foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, and neither will you!"

Now, he would not have been unusual in sleeping under the stars or being an itinerant preacher/prophet. There were a lot of them during Jesus' time. He was probably saying something more in the arena he wasn't going to rest on his laurels, that he was climbing a mountain with no top, propelled by a powerful and increasingly demanding mission that gave his life meaning, purpose and passion.

That mission was to interrupt the status quo of his culture, to interrupt the despair and resignation, the life-deadening behavior and the complacency of "life as usual." The harvest is great, he said, but the laborers are few. Come and be my laborer, he urged. Leave your attachment to your family, your tribe, your comforts, your laurels, and be bold with me. I will show you magic.

And you will come to love those from whom you unhooked yourself with a deeper and more abiding love than you had for them before.

There's a cartoon with a large convention hall divided into interest groups. Each group has a large sign identifying it: we love manatees; we like hiking; we speak Russian; we are chefs; we promote green products. There is one sign that is longer sign than the others: we like to get to know new people who are completely different from ourselves who make us think new thoughts and stretch. One person sits next to that sign.

Jesus did not apologize for paying attention to those who had cheated their brothers and sisters, like the Jewish turncoat tax collectors. And he asked his disciples not to apologize, either. "I have come to call those who are sick, tired, and hopeless, whose dark shadows have caught up with them and pulled them down. I am calling the sad to hopefulness, the angry to relief, the lonely into companionship and the misunderstood to being understood."

Then he would send out his 12 closest students and then 72 more students to go and do likewise. Preach across borders, go cold calling and if the household receives you, great, stick around. If it doesn't, shake the dust off your feet and keep going. Don't stop when you get your feelings hurt or people make fun of you or you get really frustrated. At the proper time, come on back and I'll be waiting to hear all your stories and give you salve for your wounds and corrective guidance for your failures and I promise I will listen to everything.

Chapter 6 in Luke: Love your enemies. Do you have enemies? Who thinks that way in this nice town? Oh well, there are people we might avoid, naturally, because we don't have anything to say. Or we had a difficult conversation last

time. There are people we don't ask to come to our homes, anymore, but that doesn't mean they are enemies. Heavens no!

Whose tribe are you in and who is in your tribe? I have a good friend, a devout woman in her chosen faith. When I ask her to come to a party, she has started to ask me who is coming before she accepts my invitation. There is someone – I don't know who – that she resents for some action a year ago and my friend has thrust her out of her tribe. She will not accept my invitation unless that person will not be there.

Are you willing to pray for the courage to proactively go to someone whom you think is annoyed with *you*, and ask about that? It is very scary to do this. When I have, however, I have, without exception, been very glad I did. Often the other person was surprised and had not been annoyed. Or if they had been, in the graciousness of my asking them, the issue has evaporated right then.

Take the plank out of your eye before you try to remove the speck of sawdust from your neighbor's eye. Ouch. With the measure you use, it will be measured out to you. Why do you call me Lord and not do what I counsel you to do, for *your* well-being?

We have skewed the message in our Christian teachings over the centuries. Following Jesus turned into a complex spider's web of who is being bad and who is being good, of oughts and shoulds and trying to be perfect and feeling lots of guilt. Where's the joy? Where's the freedom?

I'll close with this story. I am in the third year of a three-year international School for Leadership. There are fourteen of us: four Americans, six Protestant and Catholic Irish men and women and four Israeli men and women (Jewish, Christian and Muslim among them). We have met in N. Ireland for three years for an intensive 5-day program to launch the following year. In our 5-day last October, we worked on how we presented ourselves. We paired up and were given the task of sharing a life event with our partner that changed our lives. We were to share it in a way which didn't feel safe and easy. We were to give it all away and leave our partner inspired and transformed.

No pressure.

I was paired with Moshe, a tall, handsome Jewish man whose community leadership involves bringing Jews and Muslims together to exchange life stories with each other. He creates workshops and programs that change people's lives.

In all honesty, I do not recall the story I told him; it could have been one of several. But I will never forget what he told me.

*"I was doing my soldier duty 20 years ago when I was just 19. I was in a troop that was going to go and take a small Arab village. We gathered together and were getting ready when I spotted a small Arab boy, about 8, hiding behind a rock. I asked my commanding officer what I should do and he said, 'Tie him up.' So, I did. With my rope. I left him on the rock but I could see he was plenty scared. We got ready to go and I asked what I should do with the boy. 'Leave him.' I looked at him and I couldn't just leave him there. I saw a little boy, very scared, all tied up. And I had tied him up. I got my knife out and I went over to him and I cut the ropes and said to run as fast as he could, and I watched. It was the first time I ever saw an Arab as a person. And you know, there was a little boy tied up in me, too, and that day I let him out."*

When we pray for the courage to forgive, to approach others we have judged outside our tribal circle, the most amazing thing happens (it is what Jesus had in mind) ~ we set our hearts free.

We free ourselves from our own prisons of judgment and condemnation. We are free to go to any party without worrying who will be there. We are free to walk down any aisle in LaBonne's grocery store without wondering if we will see someone we don't know how to talk to and run to another aisle. We can come to one of the Lenten dinners here in this church on a Wednesday evening, where there is no agenda but meeting and talking and sharing and getting to know someone we do not know! How fun is that.

Jesus desires us to have free and joyous lives. It will take something on our part. As the daily Lenten message from this church said yesterday, a quote from Meister Eckhart:

"You need not look for God either here or there. He is no farther away than the door of your heart: there He stands waiting till He finds you ready to open the door and let Him enter. There is only one thing you must do: open and enter."

Amen