

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

3/27/2011

The Water of Eternal Life John 4: 7-15

In Jesus' time, the Samaritans were regarded as defiled and cursed people. The Jews never went close to a Samaritan village or even spoke to a Samaritan, fearful that they, too, might become contaminated.

Jesus defied this way of thinking. He entered a Samaritan village and asked a Samaritan woman permission to drink from the well.

This was absolutely unthinkable in those days. Who would drink water from a defiled well? Who would even speak to a Samaritan woman of all things? Who would ask her permission for anything? This woman was not respectable even by Samaritan standards. She had had five husbands and now was living with a different man. Unthinkable indeed.

Well, Jesus did the unthinkable. His total acceptance of the Samaritan woman was breath taking. His compassion elicited from her an honest and direct response. "Sir, give me the water of life so that I will never be thirsty again."

Jesus responded, "I am that water. Believe in me."

The important question for us is, what is the living water?

The living water is the unconditional and utterly inclusive grace of God. It is God's forgiveness given to all of us even before we repent.

It was this precedence of forgiveness over repentance that the religious leaders of Jesus' time could not stomach. They insisted that people must purify themselves first, and then, and only then divine forgiveness would follow.

This was why the high priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees went through elaborate washing rituals before meals, refused to eat certain animals, would not speak to women in public, and followed more than 600 laws of dos and don'ts.

Their theology was clear: God would not accept people as they were. They needed to do something to appease God.

Jesus refused this way of thinking. Why? It is because humans are so sinful that there was no way they can justify themselves to God. Human beings are sinful to the core.

We may understand the point Jesus was making this way. Suppose our friends know every thought and every emotion you and I are harboring. Suppose they find out our inner darkness and egocentrism and antagonism that we carry in our minds. We will have no friends left on earth. Sin is this inner darkness that envelops our inner being.

Try we may, we cannot overcome our sinfulness by our will power. All we can hope for is divine forgiveness. Unless divine forgiveness precedes our repentance, there is no hope for us.

Does the precedence of forgiveness over repentance encourage the status quo? Does it make us lazy and complacent? No it does not.

Think of Peter who denied Jesus three times. Jesus' forgiveness enabled him to repent. And Jesus' forgiveness transformed Peter. Many years later he traveled as far as Rome to preach the Gospel; there he was crucified head down for the sake of Christ.

What is the water of life? It is Jesus who forgives even before we repent. It is Christ who keeps on forgiving. We cannot generate life for ourselves. We live by what we receive from God. We are dependent upon God's faithful generosity, without which we simply cannot live. Jesus is the water of life that sustains us in every moment of our life.