

Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 30, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 400, "September 12, 1974," pp. 401-402, "Crazy When You Smile," pp. 406-410, "Traffic"

In chapter sixteen, Kevin M. Kruse poignantly demonstrates how our interstate system broke up thriving Black communities, carved out a clear boundary to separate and contain black communities and created transportation pathways that ensured white people could go by or around black communities without ever having to see, go through, or be in relationship with those communities. "Once they had no need to maintain constant watch over African Americans, white people wanted them out of sight. Public and private forces—city planners, local and state elected officials, federal housing program administrators, mortgage bankers, and real estate brokers—worked together to push African Americans into ghettos. The segregation we know today became the rule.... In Atlanta, the intent to segregate was crystal clear. Interstate 20...was deliberately plotted [so that] Black neighborhoods...would be hemmed in on one side of the expressway, while white neighborhoods on the other side of it would be protected."

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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 4:19-24)

The human need to separate, contain, and create travel pathways to avoid the "other" was prominent in Galilee and Judea during Jesus' lifetime, as well. Galileans and Judeans carved out travel routes on the east side of the Jordan to avoid seeing, going through or being in relationship with the Samaritans. But Jesus subverts this phenomenon when he travels through Samaria and encounters, listens to, and connects deeply with a Samaritan woman and her community. In my own life, the Spirit regularly leads me to transgress the boundaries created to separate, contain, and avoid the "other" we have been taught to fear, dehumanize, and scapegoat. In the text from John 4, we see that the Samaritan woman has internalized this separation and "othering." Yet Jesus reminds her that God is so much bigger than these human separations and is calling us to see, listen, be in relationship with, and give thanks and praise together in diverse community and in Spirit and truth!

Prayer

Holy Trinity, God of relationship and community, draw us across the boundaries we create and inherit so that we may truly see, hear and know one another as you intend. Inspire us with new ways of being in just and life-giving community so that together we can worship you in spirit and truth. Amen.