

By the Source-I Have Met Him

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It is a great joy to celebrate with you the NMS' 100th anniversary of mission to China.

First of all, I would like to bring you greetings from the faculty, students and co-workers of the China Lutheran Seminary. We rejoice with you and give thanks to God for what He has done through the labor of the NMS for the past 100 years in China, and for the partnership we have shared in the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the last four decades.

The portion of the Gospel text I would like to share with you for this event is from John 4:16-26. The Samaritan woman at the Jacob's well found Jesus' conversation with her about drawing water quite intriguing. So she readily expressed her great interest in the access to the source of the living water which welled up to eternal life, and which would quench the deepest thirst in her soul.

Having heard the woman's request Jesus shifted the focus from the gift of the living water to the pain of her marital life. At this sensitive and vulnerable issue the woman did not evade, nor rationalize. Instead, she made an immediate and candid confession of her marital failure. After that, she touched upon the most significant question in human existence, i.e., the question of true worship. As Luther often stressed it, true worship always seeks to honor God as God. And the only way to worship Him as He really is is through the power of His Spirit and in the truth of the Gospel.

This Samaritan woman had found not only the fountain of the living water, she also discovered that the person Jesus holds and is the key to the true worship of the Father. The joy of such discovery liberated her from the fetters of her self-pity, and for an audacious witness to the Messiah whom she just met face to face, and who had changed the entire course and outlook of her life.

I came from a Buddhist family of five brothers. When I was young, I used to go to the Buddhist temple with my father and watched how he worshipped his gods. As a child I was fearful of those gods, and of the grim faces of those door guardians at

the entrance of the temple. I felt those gods in the temple were distant and unknown to me. As a result, I never had the urge to pray and to bring my needs to them. Though I did not believe in God, I was not an atheist. Like many Confucianists I was morally conscientious of living out an acceptable social life. But religiously I was more of an agnostic, who simply did not know anything about God. Because I did not have faith in God, my life did not have a central goal and a clear sense of direction.

Like many young students in my country, my only goal then was to enter into a prestigious university. I thought if I could be admitted into a top-notch university, all my dreams would soon be fulfilled. However, I did not realize that life was more than entering into a promising university, more than being able to study abroad, and more than having a secure and successful career.

When I graduated from high school I participated in a highly competitive university entrance examination. In that examination I failed by a very narrow margin. That failure was a very heavy blow to me. Later I decided to try again. The following year I was fortunate enough to pass the examination and entered into the electrical engineering department of the National Taiwan University.

Was I happy about the admission into the most admired university in Taiwan? Yes, I was, but only for a short while. My parents were very proud of their son's achievement, and felt honored among relatives and neighbors. As for myself, my sense of happiness did not last long. And it was soon replaced by a deeper sense of emptiness. I felt I was chasing a soap bubble. The bubble looked splendid before I embraced it. However, when I took hold of it, it broke. It was that experience of disillusionment which triggered my intensive searching for the real meaning of life. But as to where and how could I find it, I was at loss. What I did not know was that God was searching for me long before I sought him. Neither did I know that He had been working in my heart, and had been guiding my path so that I might come to a personal knowledge of Him, and put my total trust in Him. It was not that I found Him, but He found me; not that I chose Him, but He chose me.

The turning point of my life came when I moved into the Lutheran University Student Hostel in Taipei during the second semester of my freshman year. It was there I began my first contact with the Christian church and the gospel of Jesus Christ. During my participation in Christian meetings and conversations with Christian friends, I was puzzled, on the one hand, by the strange message of the cross. On the

other, I was deeply intrigued by the One who was nailed on the cross, and resurrected on the third day. As I listened to the message, my heart began to wonder what I had to do with this crucified One, and what had He to do with me. St. Augustine said, “My heart was restless until it found rest in Thee.” And the German poet Goethe also said, “All human searches can be boiled down to the search for God.” Before I had access to the source of the ultimate meaning, I would not be able to find the meaning of my own life. Eventually, I was brought face to face with the crucified and risen Lord, the God who became human and dwelt among us. Before then, I had not the slightest idea of what sin was, and how real and deep was God’s redeeming love for the sinner like me. God indeed so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but has eternal life, and life in all its fullness. When I began to put my whole trust in Christ, and welcomed him to be the Lord of my life, I became a new person. And my life was set on an entirely new course, that is, to follow the footsteps of Christ, to live by his grace, and to witness to the gospel of his wondrous love.

Like the Samaritan woman, I had, by the grace of God, met the source of the life-giving fountain, who not only quenched the thirst of my innermost needs, but also overflows my cup with his immeasurable grace and richness. As we are celebrating the NMS’ 100th year of mission to China, I pray that God grant us each day the intensive longing for an intimate and ever-deeping knowledge of him. May He grant us the power of His Spirit that as we worship and honor Him as He really is; we are empowered, like the woman at the well, to spread the marvelous Good News of God’s contagious love. Amen!