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FMC Reedley  
John 4:21-24  
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### Holy Spaces

This Sunday I'm thinking a lot about our children and youth up at Camp Keola. I bet they are getting really excited, maybe they are even making the long drive up into the mountains as we speak. Now, I've got to admit I'm an outsider, I've never been up to Keola. But when I was a kid I would go to Camp Friedenswald in Michigan. I remember worshiping by the firelight, plunging into the frigid morning waters, playing games with new friends, and climbing up to inspiration point to look out at the expanse of God's creation. Friedenswald is a holy space for me. I met God and formed life-long relationships. And sometimes I think I matured in my faith more in those seven days per year than I did from seven weeks of church.

*Can you remember a place where you matured in your faith? A holy space where you learned to love God and love neighbor in a new way?*

When I think about my own holy spaces, I think about Seattle Mennonite Church which nurtured my call to ministry, and Iron Mountain where I hiked with my uncle in the last years of his life. My holy spaces are varied and serve me for a season of my life. But as I stand here in this sanctuary, I know that this holy space has been a source of joy and difficulty for generations. It reminds me of how holy spaces are not utopia but are made holy when we intentionally seek to love God and neighbor.

Deuteronomy tells the story of a decision. A decision to deny the high places of the native inhabitants and to embrace the temple. It kinda reminds me of the choice my parents would give me on a Sunday morning. Get in the car, we're going to church. Understanding the starkness of Deuteronomy makes Jesus's talk with the Samaritan woman more shocking. If Jesus was a good church folk, he wouldn't be having a

theological discussion with her, he would be destroying the places on the high mountains and smashing altars.

When Israel was new, they could only imagine one holy space. The temple was God's footstool, the place where God dwelt on the earth. There could only be one holy space because the Israelites told the story of how they were conquerors sent by God to occupy the land and be distinct from the native inhabitants. It should be noted that our current archaeological understanding is that the Israelites were not foreign invaders, but a selection of Canaanite tribes in the hill country that gained independence from Egypt overlord.

*Either way, out with the old and in with the new.*

So it really is scandalizing how Jesus takes this Samaritan woman seriously. The Samaritan woman knows this Deuteronomy passage well, "our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you, Jesus, say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." That's an open and closed statement Jesus, just say yes and move on. But no, Jesus says, "there will come a time when you all will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... but worship in spirit and truth."

*What does worshiping in spirit and truth mean to you?*

Is Jesus saying out with the old temple and high place will be replaced by a new kind of worship? Or is Jesus saying, soon people will find their own holy spaces to worship God?

I think what is true is that our search for a holy space to worship will be full of both answers. For some of you, you come here because you feel comfortable and feel the spirit of God moving here. For some of you, this is a new kind of worship that replaced an old and painful way. For some of you, you could not imagine another way to worship,

because this way of loving God and neighbor feeds you, and matures you in your faith. And to that, I say Amen!

But it is also true, that God will meet us wherever we go. When we come to a space, seeking to love God and love our neighbors, that space is holy. And for some people church on a Sunday morning no longer works for them. But, I have good news. First, this happened in Jesus's time, when the Romans destroyed the temple, people of God continued to worship in synagogues, and when synagogues did not work for Jewish Christians, they met in churches. Second, The people of today are not leaving Christ, but are seeking Christ outside the institutional church and finding him in book clubs and coffee houses, and gyms. People are seeking God in spaces of fellowship that look a lot more like Camp Keola and Friedenswald. Spaces that engage their minds, hearts, and bodies.

But let me be real. The special ingredient of holy space is a space where I can be totally and authentically me. Where I do not have to put up a front that I believe all the right things or never make mistakes. Holy space is made up of people who take me, with all my weirdness, brokenness, and beauty and tell me that I am a beloved child of God.

My prayer is that this may be a holy space where you truly know that you are a beloved child of God. We will know it is holy if it bears good fruit of love for God and neighbor. And may God bless all the other holy spaces of our lives. Amen!