

Chapel-Unlearn Week

October 8, 2012

President Michael K. Le Roy

Introduction

In 1988 a college student named

Scriptures. The scripture read today bears witness to this value. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ illuminate three important truths that guide Calvin's educational mission to develop inter-culturally competent Calvin College graduates. The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in the book of John is a powerful text because of what it reveals about Christ's intimate relational capacity with a woman from a different culture. The story read for you today reveals three important biblical truths that form the basis for Calvin's commitment to diversity.

Truth 1: All human beings are made in the image of God. Think about that powerful claim, and then look around you to see God's image in every face. As you look from face to face you will not see two people who are exactly alike. As you look at one another you see the images of God. I look out at you and I see God's artistry and infinite creativity and God made you all and God said: This is Good! My creativity is good. I created beauty and it is good. These differences that God made are part of the design and part of the plan. When Jesus chooses to travel in Samaritan territory and announce to the Samaritan woman that "who drinks of this water will never be thirsty again" he is proclaiming that the salvation of Jesus Christ is available to everyone. This is the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus actually says he is the Messiah. The living water Jesus refers to is not water for just the Jews, but it is water for everyone. In these words Jesus is reclaiming all human beings created in God's image, including Samaritans. In Calvin's commitment to diversity we are trying to do the same thing. In our cross cultural engagement requirement we claim that there is another history that matters. The African-American story is different than the European-American story and it is important. If you are African-American you need to see that we value your story. If you are a European-American your knowledge is incomplete if you don't know this story.

Truth 2: Sin entered the world and it corrupted every human soul, and every created thing, including all human relationships. Sin did not leave anything untouched. Because of sin, human beings enslaved one another, believed some races were superior and some races inferior. Human beings created structures and rules that categorized people according to their race, their gender, their



These first two truths, that God creates every person in his image, and that sin has corrupted our souls and our society so thoroughly that we have come to use our differences in destructive ways are essential lessons in a liberal arts college. Before we get to Jesus' message of redemption let me say a few things about the value of these lessons in a liberal arts context. Because they are practical and they should matter to you. Learning to work effectively across differences of all kinds is an essential skill for meaningful work in this world. If you do not endeavor to develop your intercultural competencies here at Calvin, you will be at a significant disadvantage. If you want to make a positive difference in the world, you need these essential intercultural skills.

Learning with people who are different from you will make you a better thinker and a better person. Over the course of my own life, I too have thought that I knew what I needed to know about diversity. But in my own diverse work environment, my own failings have been exposed every year. My African-American, Latino, female, and Asian American colleagues have taught me important lessons I needed to learn. I am indebted to them because they have gracefully helped me to see my own blind spots and my privileges. At Calvin College, we are intentionally engineering a diverse learning place for all of you so you can engage in the same kind of learning.

Truth 3: Jesus enters in to this sinful world, and he comes to save our sin-sick souls, and our broken social order. He comes to save us, but he also comes to transform, and heal and redeem this broken world. He comes with the truth that reminds us we are created fearfully and wonderfully in God's image. He comes to tell us the truth about the rules and privileges that we have created that have no place in the kingdom of God. He comes to banish the sins of racism and sexism to hell. He comes to invite you and me into His project: the project of redeeming and restoring this broken world. In the text we see that Jesus does this by staying in the community for two days. This is Calvin College's project: redeeming and restoring this broken world.

The lives of the Samaritan woman, Rebecca Skloot and Henrietta Lacks come together in Jesus' project of saving, redeeming, restoring, and healing a broken

world. Learning and telling the story of a little-known fact about the origin of the

Forgive us when we construct walls that divide and create enmity. Reveal our blind spots to us and forgive us for our many sins of omission and commission. We thank you that you sent your Son to redeem our broken human relationships. As we go forth this week, let us be your agents of renewal and Shalom. In your gracious name we pray these things. Amen.

Benediction

Go now in peace and may you do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.