

Day 74 – May 11

We often are told that we just can't appreciate the irony of the gospel stories that involve Samaritans. From the parable of the Good Samaritan to the Samaritan woman at the well, we cannot truly understand how much the people of Israel despised the Samaritans. And in today's reading, we find out why.

As the people turned away from God to idols, God chose to punish them by "sweeping them away from His presence." Thus began the Assyrian Exile. To the North, Assyria was a full-blown empire and when they attacked Israel, the Jews didn't stand a chance. So the Assyrians captured city after city and stole away the Israelites, exporting them all to Assyria. But more than that, they repopulated the area – Samaria in this case – with people from other nations they had conquered. So the land of Israel was filled with a hodgepodge of foreigners who worshipped foreign gods.

When the lion attacks began, these new Samaritan people blamed God and so called on Assyria to send them a priest who knew how to appease this God of the Hebrews so He wouldn't send any more lions against them. A priest was chosen and returned to teach them God's way. But the people weren't interested in changing religions or following a new God, just in appeasing Him. So their worship combined Yahweh worship with various other foreign worship practices. The two combined eventually into a single religion that was neither foreign nor Jewish, though they called themselves Samaritans.

When the people returned from exile, they brought back their faith which they had fought and worked hard to maintain. And upon meeting the Samaritans, they decried their mixture of Hebrew and foreign worship as sullied, impure, and worse than simple foreign god worship. And so began the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. We really don't have a modern equivalent since our society values inclusion and acceptance to such an extent. But if there were people coming close to worshipping Christ but mixing it with worship of other gods, we might begin to understand this animosity.

And if Jesus returned and shared stories, the heroes would be these impure and sullied worshipers of God, like the Good Samaritan. Perhaps we need to look harder at the grace of God and His standard of purity rather than our own. Or we may find that the sullied, impure Samaritan equivalent is us.