

“Come and see”

Matthew L. Skinner explains, “Recently, a large wealthy church decided to break up with my denomination.” Skinner continues, “I’m not 100% sure I know why. But the no-regrets explanation they wrote implied that religious differences between us were too severe for them to stay committed to our relationship.”

Skinner shares, “Religion has a way of making people do extraordinary things to create peace and unity. It also, as we know well, has a destructive capacity to turn people against one another. It can make us grip our convictions so tightly that we choke out their life. We chase others away, then say ‘Good riddance’ to soothe the pain of the separation. Even more alarming, too many religious people insist on isolating themselves and limiting their imagination about where and how God can be known.”

Skinner reveals, “All these realities take on a sad irony when we read about God promising to be outside the walls, present with different people in different places.” **“What does it look like when God defies the restrictions we presume are in place?”**

Skinner argues, “If God is not confined to churches, or to gatherings of like-minded individuals, then we may need to reassess who God is and what a life of faith looks like. A God encountered outside the walls, encountered *‘in spirit and truth,’* must be a God who dwells among flesh and blood. No grumpy old man in the sky who refuses to take us and our disappointments seriously, no dispassionate supercomputer-like mind that cannot be affected by love and rejection or progress and loss – this is a God we risk losing sight of if we cut ourselves off from our neighbors and if we define too tightly the terms of what it means to belong to ‘God’s people.’”

Skinner concludes, **“Jesus insists that God has come to be with us. All of us. And this God will stay.”** (odysseynetworks.org, *“Why You Ought to Leave the Church (John 4:5-42)”* by Matthew L. Skinner)

It is wondrous and amazing, how God went beyond any of our expectations – to demonstrate and to show us the **Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love of our Divine Parent – God’s “Agape”!** The Creator sent the creative **“Word made flesh” – the Only Son of God – Jesus the Christ – the Messiah,** even though we are **undeserving of such love and of the resulting New Relationship given to us!**

Other than the absence of Jesus saying the word, “please”, the meeting between Jesus and the woman at the well seems somewhat unremarkable at its start, **“A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink of water.’”** The Scripture explains why Jesus requested help from the woman, instead of from his disciples, stating, **“(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)”**

Then, with a sudden jolt, the Reading reports, **“The woman answered, ‘You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan — so how can you ask me for a drink?’”** In an editorial comment, the gospel author tells us, **“(Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)”** The woman at the well had a multitude of strikes against her – she was one of the hated Samaritans, a woman – an unrelated one at that, and she had a history of troubled relationships.

Discussing the example Jesus provided, through the way he related to the Samaritan woman at the well, Richard E. Gribble, says, “As Jesus came to break down barriers and reach out to all, so must we be willing to do the same.” **“First, we must recognize the reality that we do create barriers.”** “Barriers exist in our lives in many ways that often we don’t even realize. We set up boundaries in our relationships with others. There are certain people who we find acceptable and others who are not. If people possess the right credentials, whether that be intelligence, appearance, power, wealth, or influence, then they are on the inside. Those without these credentials are left out.” Gribble also points out, “We set up barriers against ourselves. We perceive that we do not possess the requisite credentials, that we don’t measure up to the task and we short change ourselves or give up.” **“We set up barriers between ourselves and God.”**

Gribble reminds us, “Jesus broke through all convention and he disappointed many whose expectations of the Messiah were not fulfilled, yet the lessons he taught must never be ignored.” **“Jesus taught the Samaritan woman that the love of God is poured out at all times for all people, those we accept and those we do not, including ourselves.”** Gribble suggests, “Lent is a time when we seek to be transformed and to be renewed. Jesus provides the perfect example and today’s celebration is the ideal environment to enter fully into this process. Let us, therefore, be renewed by breaking down the barriers of hostility, hatred, prejudice, and exclusivity. Let us build bridges of friendship, love, peace, and justice.” Gribble concludes, “Let us do what we can to build God’s kingdom in our world this day.” (“Through The Lens Of Go” from the book, SERMONS ON THE GOSPEL READINGS, Series I, Cycle A by Richard E. Gribble)

After the Samaritan woman expressed her astonishment when Jesus requested from her a drink of water, Jesus moved the conversation to a deeper level, answering, **“If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water.”** The woman, still under the sway of common prejudices and animosity between Jews and Samaritans, challenged him, **“You don’t claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?”**

Jesus deflated her attack on his ego, and then, delved their encounter into her deepest need, **“Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.”**

Not surprisingly, she failed to grasp Jesus' offer to relieve her burden, for she jumped after the concrete and literalistic opportunities he seemed to have promised, **"'Sir,' the woman said, 'give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water.'"**

Richard Lischer provides further insight into the dynamics of this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well, explaining, "The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman turns out to be a love story after all, for only one who loved you knows you as you are and not as you pretend to be. Only one who loves you knows your deepest desires." **"Only one who loves you can look at your past without blinking."** Lischer shares, "After a sermon on abuse, a parishioner said, 'I never thought I'd hear that in a Christian church. ... Thank you.'" Lischer concludes, "When something terrible in us gets brushed by the love of God, that's all we can say: Thank you. We Christians know a lot about real love, not make-believe love, but only because **'he told me everything I ever did.'**" (religion-online.org., "Strangers in the Night [Psalm 95; Ex. 17:1-7; Rom. 5:1-11; Jn. 4:5-42]" by Richard Lischer)

Part of the reason the woman at the well misunderstood Jesus' invitation was because **she never even considered the possibility that he truly knew her – her needs – her brokenness.** Jesus did that with **accepting "agape" love**, instead of the judgment she most likely and frequently experienced from Jews and religious Samaritans. With the simple request for her to bring her husband to him, Jesus gave the woman the opportunity to open the door to her pain and distress.

Sharing a small truth of her marital status, the unnamed Samaritan woman gave Jesus the opening he needed to affirm her and to powerfully show her how well he knew her and her struggles. **"Jesus replied, 'You are right when you say you don't have a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth.'"** A new possibility finally broke into her consciousness, **"'I see you are a prophet, sir,' the woman said."**

However, the woman at the well still had difficulty with overcoming her prejudice against him – the fact he was a Jew. She raised one of the many religious disagreements between Samaritans and Jews. He rebuffed her attempt to belittle his religion and to get into one of their faiths' issues of debate, while announcing the Good News for her, **"But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as He really is, offering Him the true worship that He wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of His Spirit can people worship Him as He really is."**

Not quite perceiving the full implications of what Jesus was saying, **"The woman said to him, 'I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.'"** **"Jesus answered, 'I am he, I who am talking with you.'"**

The Scripture then creates a powerful intersection between Jesus' self disclosing of his true identity – being the Messiah to the Samaritan woman at the well and the return of his disciples. The gospel author makes it clear the disciples were shocked to see him talking to this Samaritan woman at the well but they were unwilling to challenge his association with her or to make a scene with her in front of Jesus. However, for her, it was an important moment of decision and action! The Scripture reports, **"Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, 'Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?'"**

Not only did this troubled woman become the First Evangelist for Jesus, she was much bolder than his traveling band of disciples! The people in the town, evidently, were so persuaded by her powerful testimony that they pushed aside any rejection of what she claimed. We are told, **"So they left the town and went to Jesus."**

Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt aids our relating to the woman's actions by suggesting, **"it is a story we all tell in one way or another as we share with those we know the power of Jesus in our own lives."** "Your story and mine may look and sound nothing at all like the woman whose story is told today. Except that Jesus meets us, too, in the middle of the day or in the middle of the night when we find ourselves outcast or we have isolated ourselves in our misery and our grief. Jesus meets us, too, and offers us gifts which do not end. Jesus meets us, too, and sees us and knows us and invites us, too." Culminating her insight, Hunt concludes, **"And so we tell our stories and as we do we also recall the conflicts experienced and the obstacles overcome that amazingly led us to know the very same powerful love and acceptance the Samaritan woman at the well experienced so long ago."** (dancingwiththeword.com, "A Story Worth Telling: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well" by Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt)

The unidentified Samaritan woman at the well, the First Evangelist, had a brief and powerful testimony! It all came down to her declaring, **"Come and see"** about God's representative who really knew her and accepted her – **"agape" loved her** announcing it to everyone she knew! Are you and I willing to admit Jesus Christ knows us and loves us despite our problems – our unworthiness? Are you and I changed by **God's "Agape" Love**? Does your and my transformation include following Jesus' example of loving – even persons who are rejected? **Is our faith in Jesus Christ and God's Love motivating enough that you and I not only love all people but also invite everyone to experience God's "Agape" Love – to "Come and see"?** Say **"Yes"** to all of those questions and let us declare **"Come and see"** to family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even people rejected by society! **It will transform their lives!** Amen.