

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MARCH 15, 2020
THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

The Litany
Based on Psalm 66

Come and hear, stand in awe, and we will proclaim what God has done.

We lift up our voices and praise God.

When we have harbored iniquity in our hearts, our prayer is muffled.

But God heard the words of our hearts and the longing of our prayers.

Blessed be the God of steadfast love!

The Scripture
John 4:5-29

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in

spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

The Message
All Groan Up: Adaptation
Mark Briley

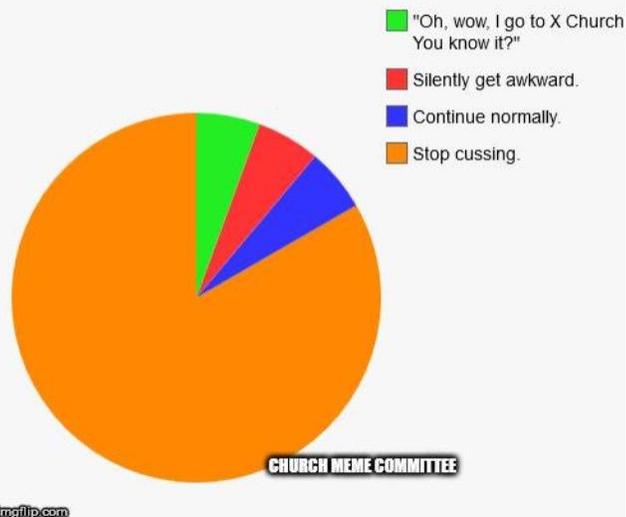
Synopsis: The woman, named only by the place she is from, encounters Jesus in a way that ultimately changes her entire community. It might be said that things weren't really going the way the woman planned at this point in her life. How often is that true of all of us? Maybe our lives are not about things going as planned, but about how we adapt, change, and grow when they don't. An everyday encounter opens the gift to be adaptable to a new way, a new hope.



Being a pastor isn't always the easiest thing to be. I'm sure the same is true for whatever you do with your time – whether that be employment, retirement, or something else entirely. I'm a PK, a pastor's kid, myself, and so I can't say I didn't know what I was getting into when I said, "Yes!" to serve God in full-time ministry. I remember, at times, when I was a kid being sensitive to the whole thing. People always want to know what you "do" or what your parents "do," and I'll admit that sometimes I wished my dad wasn't a minister. Once that word was out, the vibe often changed. I've had a lot of my own experiences in this regard, but I was excited to see that some official research has been done on the matter and the results are in.

Researchers were seeking to find answers to a very specific question. They've conveniently graphed it for our viewing pleasure. The graph title reads, "*What people do when they find out I'm a pastor during a normal conversation.*"

What people do when they find out I'm a Pastor, during a normal conversation.



You may not be able to make out the responses all that well, so allow me to read them to you. The three smaller pie shapes are equally represented with these responses: "Oh, wow! I go to Church X. You know it?" That's represented in green. Represented in red is this response: "Silently get awkward." The blue pie-shaped piece is what we most typically hope for: "Continue normally." And then you see that largest, orange Pac-man shaped portion. The number one response to what people do when they find out I'm a pastor during a normal conversation? "They stop cussing." I'm amazed at how well some can adapt on the fly. They'll say, "Why Mother

Mary, why didn't you say so earlier?" And then they go on to respond like one of the other responses suggest or tell you about a time they got ordained online so they could do a friend's wedding. That's sort of like telling your doctor you learned how to perform an appendectomy by watching a YouTube video – it's not exactly the same but you get the idea.

Adaptability – it's a key skill to navigating life. We're in the middle of something as a global community that most of us have never experienced. The coronavirus is challenging our very existence and certainly trying our discerning skills of how and when and what for and for whom. We're holding front-line care givers in our deepest prayers and it *is* on us to not make that harder for them. We continue to follow closely the direction of the health department and will adapt accordingly.

We also adapt on the fly given a certain social and professional situation. Good salespeople listen to their clients' needs and then adapt their presentation to hit home where it matters most personally to the potential buyer. Some adaptation takes a little longer. It may involve the shift of more than yourself but that of an entire organization or community. Being adaptable may be all the more important when you're talking about changing the masses. We don't tend to plan for it. We make to-do lists and get our Google Calendars in order. We make five-year and ten-year plans, but then life happens – things that we can't anticipate or prepare for with any certainty. They may be things that punch us in the gut and scoff at our carefully crafted five-year plans. Even so, when we look back at our lives those unexpected moments that called for our adaptation to a new way are the markers of what made our lives matter most – and typically are moments of influence beyond our own personal circumstances.

The woman in our Scripture focus this morning, named only by the place she is from, encounters Jesus in a way that ultimately changes her entire community. It might be

fair to say that things weren't really going the way the woman planned at this point in her life. Her five-year plan had been hijacked long ago. How often is that true of all of us? Maybe our lives are not about things going as we planned, but about how we adapt, change, and grow when they don't. An everyday encounter with Jesus opens the gift to be adaptable to a new way, a new hope.

Now – let's think about Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. What are the chances they would meet? Slim to none. While we started in verse five, for sake of the story reading like a story, we miss something significant by not including verse four. When Jesus leaves Judea on his way back to Galilee, John records that he "*had to go through Samaria.*" There is no geographical reason for this directive.¹ There was no road that necessitated a path through Samaria. This turns this simple travel narrative from a geographic footnote to a theological statement. John demonstrates that Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and her village was a part of God's desired movement of inclusion.

Have you ever had that tug to go a certain way? You couldn't fully explain why but you just had to go. "*I just had to be there,*" you'd say. And something life changing or deeply meaningful occurred because you went. For some greater purpose that couldn't be known on the front end of things, Jesus *had* to go through Samaria. And there, he meets this woman, and a water cooler conversation turned into the adaptation of the way of life for an entire community of people.

There's a lot we could get into concerning this powerful story in John's gospel. The meeting at Jacob's well – a significant landmark of faith. We could dive into the culturally-taboo conversation that takes place. Men and women weren't supposed to address each other like this in public – particularly a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman. That just didn't happen. In an attempt to avoid another 'judgy' conversation with someone, she basically says to Jesus from the onset, "*I'm a bad woman from a bad town. Leave me alone.*"

Even when the disciples came back to find the two of them talking, they didn't say anything, but John notes: "*Shock was all over their faces.*" It is funny to me how tame we make Jesus in our own minds when virtually the entirety of his ministry was completely shocking to people of that time – especially the religious folks. How would Jesus shock us religious folks today? A provocative question we'll set aside for another time.

We could talk about this woman's morals as so many like to do unfairly, what with all her marital difficulties and such. She was, as one poet put it, "*Somebody the good women could tell their daughters, 'Don't be like that.'*" We so often drop these

¹ Exegetical support for this passage comes from William Barclay's commentary on The Gospel of John. The Westminster Press. 1975.

sentiments on the lives of people whose stories we no little beyond one-liner cut downs. All of this just feeds into the unlikelihood of this encounter – two people who couldn't be more different engaging each other to a point of life adaptation. We put all the responsibility of adapting on the woman, and she certainly had adapting to do but Jesus didn't walk away from this encounter unchanged either. This certainly continued to grow his sense of any and every one being welcomed into the Good News story he was living and any and every one being capable of transforming the lives of others whether they spent years in seminary or printed off their own ordination certificate online.

For sake of our time today, however, as we continue to ponder in Lent what it means to be *all groan up*, let's capture the snapshot moment of when this woman leaves the well and before she gets back to her village. We know she is struck by her conversation because she leaves her water bucket – the very reason she went to the well in the first place. That did not matter so much now. Something much bigger was brewing. What would she do? And I'm sure she was playing it all over again in her head. "*Who's going to believe me?*" and "*Nobody trusts me anyway.*" On and on the head-game scenarios play on.

We talk ourselves out of a lot of things on the way to Point B from Point A. Think of times you've been convicted of something – or maybe even inspired by something – and you think, "*This is it. Things are gonna change. I'm taking on a new focus, a new hope and I'm going to tell people about it.*" Maybe this has happened at worship some time in your life. But from the time you left inspired to the time you got cut off in traffic on the way home, you've resigned to leave the hopeful adaptation at church and resume the angst of wondering why you can't ever get out of the rut your life is in. And, I should add, I stand here in self-judgment of the many times that such is the case in my own journey.

In his novel, *The Fall*, Albert Camus tells of a man who spends his life sitting in a bar at the center of Amsterdam, commenting on life as he observes it around him. His comments reveal much about his own nature but also speak beyond himself: The man says, "*I never cross a bridge at night Suppose, after all, that someone should jump in the water. You do one of two things: either you do likewise to fish him out, and in cold weather, you run a great risk! Or you forsake him there. Suppressed dives sometimes leave one strangely aching.*"

"Camus' character has a problem: He is afraid. And just what is he afraid of? Does he fear crossing bridges? Diving into cold water? Not really. His comments reveal that his real fear is of getting involved, even by chance, in any situation where he might have to

make a choice, where he might have to become personally involved in the risk."² Instead? He has another round at the bar and numbs his fear of change, purpose, or even faith itself.

Dr. Mary Hulst is the college chaplain at Calvin College. As part of the school's January Lecture Series, she opened one of the sessions by describing two habits every student at Calvin is expected to have. The first is *grit*. Grit is that extra umph inside of you that you call upon to see something of importance through or come back after something fails, stronger and ready to try again. The second is *faith*. Dr. Hulst says, "*If you believe the Gospel matters, it's got to go beyond your personal salvation.*" Grit and faith. Grit and faith. Do you have grit and faith?

This nameless woman at the well – unnamed as one who was likely identified by some unbecoming label more than her own name – has grit and a newfound faith. And somehow, that grit and faith surpass all the self-talk she surely engages in on her way from the well back to her village. She believed she could come back again – to make something of meaning come to be and she also believed she couldn't, with any integrity, keep this to herself. She had to take the risk of sharing. She found a new dignity and gravity in her conversation with Jesus as so many people did. We don't casually walk away from encounters like that. And what does she do? She takes a risk on adaptation. She says to the people in her village – "*Come meet a man who knows everything about me and still wants me to be a part of something amazing.*" In her life review someday down the road... when her life was coming to a close, she surely looked back at this moment as the day everything changed.

I wonder if the reality is that Jesus didn't just say "No" to her. I'm not specifying his statements now but the sentiment. Just saying "No!" is so negative and gives no real way forward. It's just negative energy. If you are going to make "No" a reality in someone's life – whether that's a "No" to drugs or promiscuity or injustice or bigotry or elitism or whatever "No" you're after, there must be a positive "Yes" energy to move forward well. You can't just go into a struggling, impoverished community and tell them to say "No" to some way of life without giving them a real "Yes" to embody... and then sticking with them long enough to embody it alongside of them. If the church is to have any level of influence in our world, we must offer a "Yes" to counter the countless "No's" the world experiences all the time. Jesus is all about the big "Yes!" His new disciple in this woman was banking on it. And I'll tell you this – when someone finally catches that passion, sees that big "Yes" of God and adapts their lives accordingly, the

² --Allene M. Parker, "Bridges to Life," in *Bread Afresh, Wine Anew: Sermons by Disciples Women*, ed. Joan Campbell and David Polk (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1991, 137).

ripple effect is huge. With our planet growing smaller and smaller all the time, Frederick Buechner's comparison of humanity to a gigantic spider web is most fitting. He writes: *"If you touch [the web] anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked. No man [no woman] is an island."*³

Jesus was clearly not interested in keeping up barriers. We're so good at creating more of them for some reason – fear of difference I suppose – fear of risking comfort – fear of risking our big "Yes." When we live the interconnected life Jesus offers, it naturally will break down all artificial barriers of class, race, nation, gender, age – whatever separates us from one another. Jesus *had* to go through Samaria to teach us that there is no place God will not go.

Where are we willing to go? As individuals? As a church? As a community? These coming days will test our adaptability. And we will rise together to discover how we can love and serve and hold a global community in crisis. What can you adapt even today that let's someone else into the story of God's love? What attitude adaptation can you make – a concerted effort not just today but each day – so that those who know you best will ask, *"What's going on with you?"* And you can tell them, *"I said, 'Yes!'"* It will be hard, but I can promise you this: If it's *not* hard, it won't make your highlight reel some day when you're doing your own life review. It's more than simply not cussing once you learn you're talking to a pastor. It will be something that causes you to leave your water bucket at the well. It's telling a story with your life that is clear that you're living the big "Yes" God has offered you in Christ. You can do it. You *are* doing it.

³ Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark* [New York: Seabury Press, 1969], 45-46.