

“In the name of the one holy and living God.” AMEN

The obstacles. It seems like the obstacles we are facing this week are almost insurmountable. Society has been transformed with no person not being directly impacted by the rippling effects of the Coronavirus.

When I hear this gospel reading from John what rises to the surface are all the obstacles Jesus goes through to seek out this woman at the well.

The gospel begins talking about Jesus’ travel. He is working his way back to Galilee when he gets to the town of Sychar and stops to rest near a well. Like today, crossing towns meant crossing places with different rules and laws and people. He crosses a geographic divide.

Then a woman comes to get water from the well. She is there around noon which is an unusual time to be gathering water. Wells were known as social gathering places and it was customary to go for water earlier in the day. Noon would be a far more uncomfortable time to get water with the heat of the day rising. The writing is on the wall that the woman is an outcast. She goes to the well at an off time because she is separated from others socially. She goes when she thinks she won’t run into anyone else. And we know Jesus is tired, yet he goes there to meet her.

The woman is also caught off guard when Jesus, a man, asks her for a drink. It was unusual for a man at that time to start a conversation with a woman. Yet Jesus finds time to talk with her.

The Samaritan woman herself says Jews considered Samaritans to be unclean. Any Jew that drank from the bucket of a Samaritan would have been marked as an outcast. There were clear social divisions and a deep distrust between Jews and Samaritans and Jews generally would not be seen talking with a Samaritan. Yet Jesus the Jew asks the woman from Samaria to use her bucket.

And then Jesus points out this woman has had five husbands and is now with a man who is not her husband. This is probably the reason she is at the well at midday, instead of when the other women would have been there.

She was ashamed so she stayed separate from the others. Yet Jesus was not ashamed to talk with her.

Many people interpret this text as a woman who needs to repent and be forgiven, but there is no mention of either of these things here. Jesus doesn't lecture her on having five husbands. With what we know about the time, women were important for bearing children and continuing the family line. They were not allowed to divorce men. And we know women are not in the bible nearly as often as men. In this part of the gospel, Jesus has the longest conversation recorded in the New Testament. So we stop and listen despite the obstacles that may have us not paying attention. What we do not hear is Jesus schooling her for being a bad person. It is quite likely she was divorced five times for being barren. So she's seen as useless, an outcast, separated from society because at that time women relied on men for what they needed for daily life. Yet Jesus made time to seek her out.

Jesus crossed all these divides to talk with this woman. God seeks us out no matter where we are. God goes over all hurdles to seek us out just as he sought out this nameless woman at the well.

Our familiar well is St. Paul's. That's where we are used to encountering God every Sunday.

And I'm going to call out the elephant in the room...well in the virtual room that we worship in today. We can't worship together in person because we need to practice social distancing to minimize the impact of the coronavirus. This virus is a barrier to us coming together as a community.

The good news is that God seeks us out where we are at. We don't have to be physically at St. Paul's. God is coming for us. God seeks us out where we are and it is our challenge to accept God into our life in a deeper way this Lent.

This gospel also reminds us to seek out the other. With the invasion of the Coronavirus into society many more barriers to coming together are occurring and continuing to occur. It seems this has created even more

barriers between us and those we don't know, or those who are sick or could be sick. And yes, we do want to play it safe and protect ourselves and those we are responsible for. There is no doubt about that. But this added challenge means additional suffering for those infected or quarantined or isolated, or for those that love these people. For our friends and family members who are in high risk groups, it's our chance to touch base with them about their precautions. For those who are isolated, we can call to check on them.

Part of our reflection this Lent may include praying for those most impacted by the Coronavirus-the sick, the quarantined, those who won't get paid because they will be off work, the kids who rely on lunch for their main meal of the day. We are challenged to pray for those who no one is checking on and for those who are forgotten. And for those who have died, and for everyone in this uncertain time...WE CAN PRAY.

My guess, my educated guess is that Jesus not only interacted with the woman at the well, but that he prayed for her as well. And I believe God is pleased when we pray. Because when we pray, transformation can happen.

Friends, Lent is a time to listen for God seeking us. It's a time to reflect. It's a time when we can choose to accept God seeking us out. It's a time when we are working toward a conversion within our self. A time when we try to get ourselves right to accept Christ. It's a time when we create room to accept Christ into our life in a new, expanded way that we have not known before. We do this by breaking down barriers between us and God.

We heard how the woman at the well is transformed by her interaction with Jesus. She starts out feeling so ashamed she doesn't want to run into anyone. After spending time with Jesus she is no longer the person who feels separated from society and full of shame. She leaves her bucket and goes back to the city to tell of the Messiah! And because of her transformation to a person who knows Jesus down to her core, those she tells also believe. She is back to being unified with the society from which

she was ostracized. We witness Jesus making her whole and disbanding the obstacles that kept people divided.

Many of you know an icon of our faith has died this week. Barbara Harris was the first bishop of not just the Episcopal Church but of the greater Anglican communion. And apart from breaking barriers herself, she also spoke out against the separations in society, especially with regard to racism, sexism and homophobia.

I can't help but think that it is difficult to keep up with the changes happening in our society just in this last week. It seems we don't know what to expect from day to day and the future seems even more uncertain. But what we can rely on is that God will be with us seeking us out the whole way.

Not being able to come to St. Paul's is challenging. But it also can be a blessing in that we can learn to seek God, and understand that God is seeking us wherever we are at. God doesn't just show up for us at St. Paul's. I think, God is showing up for you right now, where you are at.

We wait for the time when we can worship together again as a community knowing God seeks us out. God will go across social boundaries, over the mountains, into the caves, down in the ditches, to the deepest darkest places, the places where we feel shame and guilt, when we are ill, God seeks us out. And God seeks us out in our best times, in the good places, when the sun shines in March in Michigan, or when we get good news, God stops at no measure to find us and be with us. May we accept this into our hearts.

~Amen

#Barriers #Seeking #Transformation #Coronavirus

John 4:5-42

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St. Paul's, Jackson

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