

Church of the Gethsemane, March 3, 2005, "The Dating Game."
John 4:1-15, 27-30

The past few Monday nights I have come across that show on TV called "The Bachelorette." I have been so disgusted by it that I am for some reason drawn in to it, not quite able to turn it off. And so I choose an in between and instead mute the TV, so that I catch the gist of what's going on but I don't have to suffer through listening to it. I wonder why I can't just change the channel, why my remote seems to gravitate towards that stupid show, somehow without my turning it there.

Part of me wishes it could be that easy, I guess. That I could be chosen for a TV show that sets up and pays for very romantic dates. I could court with 15 different women and they all want to be with me. We go out on dates and I decide at the end of the night if they are disqualified from the running or if we should keep going. All it takes is one date, one night, and by the end I can decide if they make me laugh enough, or if it feels good enough when we kiss, or if they listen to me well enough, or if the flowers they bring me at the beginning of the night are beautiful enough. And at the end of a series of dates I have found my partner for life and we can get married and live happily ever after. Maybe I want to fantasize about how I want a relationship to be that easy and that is why I can't stop watching "The Bachelorette."

But after I am done fantasizing, I just get mad. First of all, I could never *get* on a show like The Bachelorette. I am not thin enough and certainly not straight enough and don't have blond hair. I do have the white skin going for me, but that is about it. And then, I really get to thinking and if we are watching such trash TV like the Bachelorette, it gets in our subconscious and I somehow or another wish that this may happen to me, that life should be this easy, that without much thought or experience this is how we are to choose our life partners and our jobs and our homes and our families and futures. I get mad because I realize how few skills so many of us are taught and given to live full and fruitful lives. I know very few people who have good examples from their parents. And if this is how we are teaching our young people how to make life decisions, through shows like "The Bachelorette" and "The Apprentice" and "Survivor," through shows that do not reflect the complexity of the lives of anyone in this room this morning, then I grow very concerned for the world around me.

I know you heard Liz preach about the Samaritan woman by the well and her encounter with Jesus last week, but she gave me permission to come back to that text this week, she thought it may be interesting to have another perspective on it. I have loved this text for a long time, because it speaks so clearly of how God is calling us into transformation and how scary that can be, yet incredibly rewarding. You see, at the well, this is where a real life version of "the Bachelorette" took place.

It was the hottest time of the day, right about noon. It was high sun, shining brightly. She carried a big water jug with her, so heavy and holding her down. She was all alone. She wasn't there when the other women were present at the watering hole, at the well, one could surmise that this woman, this nameless Samaritan woman, that she was an outcast in the society in which she lived. To start with, Samaritans, while Jews, were a fringe group. They were minorities.¹ But you know how it goes, every community, regardless of how down and out we are, we find ways of dividing us further, you know how an out crowd then creates another level of those who belong and those who don't. And this Samaritan woman who we meet at the well, she wasn't in. If she was, we would have found her with the other women, complaining about the heaviness of the water jugs, helping each other with laundry, talking about their children and husbands and neighbors. And it wouldn't have been

¹ Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 40.

noon. But instead, at the worst time of the day, the hottest time when the heat and the light of the sun is debilitating, we find two tired, hungry, thirsty and probably lonely people, Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

But before we go any further, let us remember that wells are not just places to congregate and talk and collaborate, in this ancient society where we find the Samaritan woman and Jesus, wells were essentially the sets for TV sitcoms like "The Bachlorette." Jesus knew it, the Samaritan woman knew it, they were both Jews, although from rival communities. But they both knew what happened at the well. No matter how tired they were they couldn't have forgotten that it was at the well where Abraham sent his servants to find a wife for Isaac. The servants knew that Rebekah was the wife for Isaac when they asked her for a drink of water and she in turn gave it. And then we have the well where Jacob met his wife Rachel. Jacob comes to a well and Rachel approaches with her father's sheep. Jacob rolls the heavy, heavy lid off the well and gives the sheep a drink. They become life partners. And this is the same well, thousands of years later, where we find Jesus and the Samaritan woman. And let us not forget to go back further than Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Rachel to remember Hagar. When she was running away from her mistress Sarah after conceiving by Abraham, she arrives at a well and is promised that she will bear a son. Then she finds herself again by the well after being cast out into the wilderness. Her son was thirsty, she was thirsty too, if not for water, then for healing. And God provided a well and she gave her son a drink. God makes promises to Hagar at that well.

Yes, at those wells generations are promised and created, matches are made, God is present and transforming.

And so we have Jesus and the nameless Samaritan woman, tired, thirsty, a bit ornery from the journey of life, at that same well where Jacob met Rachel so many generations ago. I wonder if the nameless woman was as culturally beautiful as the bimbos on "The Bachlorette." I wonder if Jesus were attracted to her or if he knew that she would be his first Evangelist, as she later became, if he knew that his disciples would become angry and confused because he wasn't only speaking to a woman but a Samaritan woman at that? And then Jesus asks the mother of all favors, or he commands it: Give me a drink. She knew that this really was a secret password for "marry me." Hagar acknowledged God and God gave her a drink, Rebekah gave Abraham's servants a drink and "boom" Isaac had a new wife. Jacob gives Rachel's sheep a drink and that was the match for him. She was no idiot, this woman, she knew they weren't supposed to be talking, she knew that they wouldn't make a proper match, her being a Samaritan and all. I sense a lack of healthy mistrust in her voice as she demands of him: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" And then he gives her some rhetoric and mumbo jumbo about living water and God's gifts and very practically she turns around and says "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep." This woman has her life experience behind her and she knows how heavy those buckets are and she knows how deep that well leads into the earth's core. So deep is that well, full of history and matches made and hurt and pain, so deep is that well and he doesn't even have a bucket. And she continues, "who do you think you are, better than Jacob who gave us this well?" And then more mumbo jumbo he speaks about never being thirsty again. And then, this is where the miracle happens. Maybe it wasn't all rhetoric, maybe she really was tired of lugging that jug of water behind or on top of her shoulders every day, and she took a grave risk and said to him "give me that water so I don't have to ever come back here at high noon with the light blinding my eyes and the sun exposing my skin and my muscles failing underneath the heat lugging this heavy jar to draw water. I am tired of life as it currently stands and it is time to make a change."

When they woke up that morning did they think this ever would happen? Did they think they would meet the Messiah? For Jews aren't supposed to be cajoling

with Samaritans. And women should not be talking with men.

Have you ever had that time in your life when enough is enough, you have to make a change and you are scared to death and you don't know if it is the right one or not but you know you have to do it? Or the change was put on you, after one too many failed attempts at relationships or one too many times of scuffle with the law or after one too many fights with your mother or one too many drinks or hits, and you said, "enough, this isn't working, something has to change, I am ready to let go of this water jar that I have carried back and forth every day and is holding me in bondage."

But there is no reality TV show that helps us through this time. There is no show that is going to glorify honesty and integrity and the journey toward wholeness, that is going to exemplify letting go of old behaviors that regardless of how destructive you know they are, still are comforting and controllable.

And so that TV sequel is found in AA and NA meetings and recovery clinics, in the sanctuary and meeting hall of Gethsemane Church, in support groups and in Bible study. This transformation that takes place when you see your life crumbling around you and you say "enough." It is a journey that takes much longer than a few episodes or even an entire season. This is a journey that takes a lot longer than the 40 days of Lent or even an entire Christian year. For this is the journey of a lifetime, this is a journey of a Christian.

Jesus spent his life running, he didn't run away from himself, he ran so that he could live. He ran from destruction so that he could prevent destruction, he sat with the outcasts so that he could sit closer to his Creator. He was on a journey and today we see one little glimpse into that story, of how in his running and in his sitting, he not only changed the life of the Samaritan woman but allowed himself to be challenged and changed. As two individuals who meet at the side of the road and have a life-changing exchange, the energies are shared and drawn together so that neither can go away the same.

My father is a scientist and a small-town boy. He isn't so keen on change or transformation and he likes things clean, organized and understandable. He grew up on a farm and then in small town Ohio. I have fond memories as a child with dad helping me, patiently with math homework and planting in the back yard. The farm boy never left him and has been passed on to me. I remember learning the difference between weeds and plants and how to get the root out when it is a weed. Once I arrived at the point of life when your parents are more embarrassing than anything else, dad and I didn't talk much, we didn't plant together anymore and I certainly didn't want help on my math homework. And I was struggling, I couldn't tell him how much I was struggling to figure out who I was. I was trying my hardest to ignore puberty and didn't have the tools to figure out any of the feelings inside of me.

My story is that one Thanksgiving, when I was in college, I came out to my father, against the strong advice of my mom and aunts. I told him that I was dating a woman. My dad is a scientist and small town boy, remember! He thought he had done something wrong, his genes were wrong, he hadn't been a good father. He blamed himself. His genes and his parenting. We barely talked that year. It was painful and dad needed time and I needed acceptance. In October of the next year our family was having a conversation together. Dad asked me why I was a lesbian. That is the one they he needed to know. He is a scientist. He had to know why. My 15-year old brother blurted out before I had a chance to say anything "well dad, why are you straight?" My dad sat there, dumbfounded. He clearly hadn't thought about that before. He couldn't come up with anything besides, "because I am." The way I see it, that was the moment. That was the moment when he couldn't go backwards but was forced to move forwards, was forced to deal with himself so that he could have a relationship with his family.

A year from that Thanksgiving we were driving through the Ohio cornfields.

It was my grandmother's last Thanksgiving on this earth. Some say that if you listen hard enough you can hear the corn grow at night. We were driving in pitch dark, dad and I, back to my aunt's house, where I could sit on the front porch swing and listen to the corn grow. I remember the sky clear, the night crisp, the moon full. The light pouring into our windows and no cars in front of me to keep me from speeding down the two-lane rural highway that I had driven more times than I could remember. We hadn't really talked, dad and I, for many years. Yet here we were, we couldn't get away from each other, in the cornfields that raised him and held him close to his ways. Out of the blue, out of the dark beautiful night he told me that he was a scientist, that which he couldn't explain he had believed to be wrong. But I was his daughter, and if this is who I was he couldn't explain it but it didn't mean I was wrong. I had a place, I was being held by my father whom I had distanced myself from for so long. The stars were glimmering down on me, the darkness of the night, the clearness of the sky, the cornfields of tradition, my father changed forever, my father who had had enough of fighting with himself and had to move forward. The Spirit was speaking to me and to him, calling our names, just as God chooses us all today, just as God chooses us to partner together. And that is where the real relationship was formed. You are my beloved. I am always with you, I could hear calling to me driving through the cornfields.

I was given this little framed quote by a good friend of mine who has since passed. Her name was Beverly and I cherish it and keep it in my prayer space in my home, it says "Recovery is not a place, a destination to be reached, it is a journey, a journey of hope and healing and peace." Do you hear God calling your name on that journey?: You are my Beloved, let's go on a date, put down your water jars and follow me!