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The Power of Being Known
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Psalm 139; John 4: 7-19, 28-30

She had several strikes against her: First of all, she was a despised Samaritan, with whom Jews had absolutely no contact. Secondly, she was a woman: unnamed and expendable, not worth a man's time or effort. Finally, if we are to take the text at its word, the implication is there that she was promiscuous. Five husbands and now a sixth "significant other" with whom she was living "without benefit of clergy" as my Grand-mother would have said it... In that culture, you don't get much lower on the totem pole than this.

And yet, without hesitation, without glancing around to see if anyone was looking, Jesus entered intimately into her life. Breaking every social norm, he did what he always did by compassionately entering her story, accepting her without judgement, and therein empowering her to be the full, whole person that God had created her to be. How did he do it?

Well, he started by making himself vulnerable. In the verse before what we heard earlier, it says he was hot and tired from the long journey. And the first thing he did was allow her to know that by saying, "Give me a drink." He didn't, in other words, start by chastising or focussing on her from a one up position. He started by letting her know that he got thirsty too. In a sense, he put them both on a level playing field.

Next, he saw beneath the surface level of her story. In wisdom and compassion, he went right to the deeper issues. When she asked him, "how is it that you, a Jew, ask ME, a Samaritan for water?" he goes right to the heart of the matter and says, in essence, "I can give you the water of life such that you never grow thirsty again." He knew that what she really longed for was not superficial, but was something deep and powerful, something that would fill her every longing such that she wouldn't have to give herself away to any man who came along just to get some affection, some sense of worth and value from the outside, because she clearly didn't

have any on the inside. He saw beneath her behavior, the point at which most people would have gotten stuck in judgement, and he revealed to her, in compassion, her deeper longing, her thirst for living waters, which was a symbol for love and wholeness, for spiritual fulfillment. He revealed to her that she was emotionally and spiritually empty, and that until she dealt with that, she would get nowhere on her spiritual journey.

And how did he do all this? He took the time to learn the details of her life. In this case, she didn't even have to say them, so perceptive was this healer, this Jesus. He picked up the details of her story from the energy frequency I guess, something I'm not shocked that a person of his spiritual depth and perceptiveness could do. In whatever way he did it, he took the time to learn the particulars of her story in a Psalm 139 kind of way. That's where the Psalmist says, “

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”

That's how he knew her. He learned about every longing, every detail of her sad, empty life, and then he rephrased them back to her, such that she could now see herself in this new and different way.

He made himself vulnerable. He accepted her just as she was, without judgement. He took the time to learn the details of her story and compassionately reinterpreted them back to her. And therein, she was healed.

So the long and short of it is this: WE are now Christ's body on Earth. We are literally the hands, feet, mouth and ears of Christ, and we are called to do this for one another, and for all

those in our lives. We are called to listen deeply to one another; in compassion, to listen and love one another into spiritual wholeness. And we are called to allow God to do this for us. As disciples of Christ, we are called to some kind of ongoing spiritual practice wherein we come to experience ourselves as deeply known and loved by God in a Psalm 139 way, such that we gradually experience ourselves as transformed by God. God does it for us, then we “put flesh on it” and do it for one another in spiritual community.

To get at the power that can be released when we do this for one another, I will share an extended passage from an essay by Brenda Ueland entitled “Tell Me More” It is a longer passage than I normally would use, but it is so well written that it is worth quoting in its length. Says Euland: “I want to write about the great and powerful thing that listening is. And how we forget it. And how we don’t listen to our children, or those we love. And least of all — which is so important too — to those we do not love. But we should. Because listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. Think how the friends that really listen to us are the ones we move toward, and we want to sit in their radius as though it did us good, like full spectrum rays.

This is the reason: When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life. You know how if a person laughs at your jokes you become funnier and funnier, and if he does not, every tiny little joke in you weazens up and dies. Well, that is the principle of it. It makes people happy and free when they are listened to. And if you are a listener, it is the secret of having a good time in society (because everybody around you becomes lively and interesting), of comforting people, of doing them good.

Who are the people, for example, to whom you go for advice? Not to the hard, practical ones who can tell you exactly what to do, but to the listeners; that is, the kindest, least censorious,

least bossy people that you know. It is because by pouring out your problem to them, you then know what to do about it yourself.

When we listen to people there is an alternating current, and this recharges us so that we never get tired of each other. We are constantly being re-created. Now there are brilliant people who cannot listen much. They have no ingoing wires on their apparatus. They are entertaining, but exhausting, too. I think it is because these lecturers, these brilliant performers, by not giving us a chance to talk, do not let us express our thoughts and expand; and it is this little creative fountain inside us that begins to spring and cast up new thoughts, and unexpected laughter and wisdom. That is why, when someone has listened to you, you go home rested and lighthearted. Now this little creative fountain is in us all. It is the spirit, or the intelligence, or the imagination — whatever you want to call it. If you are very tired, strained, have no solitude, run too many errands, talk to too many people, drink too many cocktails, this little fountain is muddied over and covered with a lot of debris. The result is you stop living from the center, the creative fountain, and you live from the periphery, from externals. That is, you go along on mere willpower without imagination. It is when people really listen to us, with quiet fascinated attention, that the little fountain begins to work again, to accelerate in the most surprising way.”

.....So how is your little fountain these days? Euland describes that fountain as spirit, intelligence, imagination. I'd call it God, intermixed with the best, most whole parts of ourselves. Is your fountain bubbling up and providing living waters? Is it refreshing and renewing your life, such that you can be Christ's body for others, like the woman at the well who went on to share her experience with the townspeople? Or is your fountain covered over with debris, such that you are dry and empty, and looking for externals to fill your longing? Jesus says, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Perhaps its time to come to the well.

And as a symbol of this, today I am going to invite you to participate in a ritual with me. On the Communion Table, we have a small fountain. And I would now invite any who feel so

inclined, to come forward and dip your hand in the water, representing your decision to seek the living waters anew. Perhaps there is some debris covering over your little fountain that you need to remove from your life. Perhaps you need to seek God's renewing waters so that you can be a better listener for those in your life. Perhaps you don't know what you need, only that you feel dry or empty. In any case, if you are so moved, I invite you to come forward now and touch this symbol of living water. I pray that it might gush anew in your life, bringing renewal and healing for you and then for all with whom you minister. Nothing less than this is our calling. Amen.