

Things Jesus Taught Us (4)

By

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Read John 4:7-26

Last Saturday morning, I woke up early to take my Mom to the airport and stopped by Hardees for biscuits and gravy on my way over to my parent's house. **Joan thinks that kind of food is bad for me, and doesn't want me eating it.** Southern Baptists have to sneak to drink a beer. I have to sneak to eat biscuits and gravy. So I walked into Hardees and it was just packed with men, all of whom looked guilty, like they'd been caught doing something bad, and there were some Amish guys there. **Four of them—an older man, two younger men, and a boy.** They looked ill at ease, like they didn't belong, strangers in a strange land, Israelites in the land of Egypt.

I was standing in line behind one of the young Amish men when he turned and smiled at me. **But it was a nervous kind of smile, almost as if he were afraid of me.** I asked what brought him to Danville on a Saturday morning and he said, "We're going to the city for a workshop". "Oh, you're going to Indianapolis?" I asked.

"No, Danville."

Only an Amish person would think of Danville as a city.

He asked if I were going to the workshop.

I told him I hadn't planned on it, then asked what the workshop was about, and he said, "It's a workshop with WoodMizer."

"Oh, well," I said, "I pastor a Quaker meeting and one of our Quakers works at WoodMizer, so you'll get to meet him. His name is Gene Carter. He's a great guy. You tell Gene we spoke, and he'll take good care of you."

As soon as I said that the anxiety fell away from that young man's face, and he lit up. **He had made a connection.** Now he knew a name, and had a connection. Isn't that all that most of us want? Especially when we're afraid or feeling out of place. To have a connection with someone.

He said, "If I see Gene, I'll tell him we met."

Now he had a name. Now he belonged. Now he was connected.

So this woman is at the well. It is six hours after sunrise, John tells us. Going to the well was a morning activity. The women would go together before the heat of day. **But this woman**

wasn't welcome with the other women, so she's there by herself. Five husbands. Probably why the other women didn't want to be with her. She was always on the prowl for another man, maybe their man. **She's a lonely, broken woman, hoping to really connect, but never does.** And now she is ostracized by her community. Lonely in a crowd.

You remember your first day of college? First day on the job? **All those people and you didn't know one of them, and wanted so badly to make a friend.** That's this woman. Her whole life is like that, day after day. She just can't make it work. Can't make any relationship stick. **Her disappointments have made her bitter, so when she sees Jesus she starts arguing with him, mocking his religion, trying to reject him before he rejects her.** A defense mechanism, of sorts.

He knows about her somehow. John likes to portray Jesus as a mind reader, but I think Jesus just paid attention and listened to people and had a knack for reading people. **What he read in this woman was that she desperately wanted to belong, wanted to connect, but didn't know how, and had tried and failed so many times that it had left her cynical and quarrelsome.** So when she pauses in her debating, he says, "Why don't you call your husband and bring him here so we can talk?"

She says, "I'm not married."

Jesus said, "I know. You've been married five times and the man you're living with now isn't your husband."

There's no judgment in his voice, no condemnation. He's simply acknowledging her brokenness.

But this is too painful for her to admit, so she immediately changes the subject.

When we're not ready to admit our problems, we'll do everything we can to shift the spotlight, and that's what she does. "My people worship God on the mountain, but your people say Jerusalem is the place God ought to be worshipped."

Jesus tells her that worshipping God isn't about being in the right place, but about being in the right spirit and facing the truth. She deflects that, and says, "That's all well and good, but none of us will really know the truth until the Messiah comes."

And Jesus said, "Who do you think you are speaking with?"

As soon as Jesus said that, the woman made the connection. She not only saw Jesus for who he was, she saw herself for who she was. Have you ever had a moment like that? **When you just have this blinding insight into your life, the light bulb goes on, and you think, "Whoa, how did I get here? This isn't where I want to be in life?"** You're disconnected from the people you love. You're isolated and estranged because of the choices you've made. **Feeling like an Israelite in the land of Egypt.** But no one put you there. You put yourself there. Then you realize it's time to move.

I know a man who's an alcoholic. His family challenged him about it, but he would never admit to it. **Drank every day, sat in a bar every evening, woke up in the middle of the night for a**

drink. But he wasn't an alcoholic, he said. His family kept challenging him and one day he broke down and said, "I have a problem. I need help." **That was the start of his new life, the start of his reconnection with his family and friends.**

So too with this woman. She went back to her village and told everyone, "Come meet a man who knew everything about me." **Her encounter with Jesus became the doorway through which she finally changed, finally connected, finally belonged.**

About fifteen or so years ago, a lady showed up at the meeting I was pastoring. She had hepatitis and needed a new liver. She was all yellowy, just full of jaundice. **Nice lady, had a good family, but no extended community.** One of her neighbors belonged to our meeting, so when this lady was down in the pits, the neighbor said to her, "None of our families can give us all the love we need. You need a church. Come to church." **So the lady started coming to meeting.** She was in and out of the hospital the next few years, people from the meeting would come sit with her and bring meals to her family.

Then she had a liver transplant and it was rough. Nearly died a dozen times over, but people were faithful and attentive, her doctors were good, and she hung in there for seven years. I moved away to Danville, kept in touch with her by the phone, then got word from her husband that she was dying, so I went to see her at the hospital. I took one look at her and knew this was it. **She was really weak.** I sat down beside her, took her hand, and she found the strength to say one thing to me. **She said, "I'm so glad I had my church."**

Most days for most of us are good. **But some days we feel this distance, this isolation, this aloneness.** We want to belong, but don't know how. We want to connect, but can't find the bridge. We see where we want to be, we just can't seem to get there. **We're strangers in a strange land.** Now it's not like that all the time, but it's like that enough of the time so that you know what I'm talking about.

Jesus had a soft spot for people in that fix. The woman at the well, moving from one broken marriage to another. The tax collector Zacchaeus, cheating and scamming and scheming. The man from Gerasene, so out of his mind he was bound with chains and made to live in the graveyard outside of town among the pigs. **All of them lost.** And what Jesus did was point them toward home. Gave them a name. Made a connection. Showed them the way. I tell you, Friends, isn't that why we go to church? Isn't that why Sunday mornings mean so much to us. **Because we know that one day we'll wake up and our cupboards will be bare, and the only food we're going to have are these memories.** But that will be enough, and that will get us home.