

John 4:27-30

27 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?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

Jesus was in the Judean countryside and the disciples were baptizing a lot of people. The Pharisees became concerned that Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John the Baptist. So Jesus and the disciples left Judea to go back to Galilee and traveled through Samaria. During the Exile, this area was conquered by Assyria. The people were slaughtered. Those that remained intermarried with their invaders creating a mixed race. This mixed race was discriminated against by the Jews of the day, many of them refused to travel in Samaria or have anything to do with anyone from Samaria. However, Jesus loves everyone and shows no prejudice or racism. He leads the disciples through Samaria and stopped at Jacob's well. A woman came to the well to draw water and Jesus talks with her.

In the Scripture, Jesus violates strict social convictions. For a man to talk with a woman alone in public is taboo. It is culturally prohibited. The disciples are indoctrinated by culture like everyone else is. They are shocked that Jesus is talking with woman in public. But since it is Jesus, they do not question his motives or actions. The woman rushes off to the community. She leaves the water jar because she is no longer concerned about getting water from the well and it will only slow her down. She goes into her community and testifies. The whole community comes to Jesus.

The following is a real-life story from someone we do not know. As a teenager, I was one of the first girls in the area to be given the role of altar server. I served almost every weekend and also attended a second mass because I was in the choir. My first inkling that organized religion was not for me was when I received a phone call from the Deacon the night before a special Mass, and he told me that the Bishop didn't want to say Mass with a girl on the altar. After college, I was asked to run a teen's choir. I was honored, and formed a small group of instrumentalists and singers. I was proud of our group, but the priest would talk monthly to the congregation on how the teen choir wasn't good enough and tried to solicit opinions for how to change the work we were doing. I was very hurt because I had spent so long serving my church. I left the church soon after getting married in my 20s. I still believe in God, but I prefer to do it without the discrimination and hurtful comments, so I am no longer part of any organized religion."

The Bishop didn't want to say Mass with a girl on the altar because the Bishop failed to understand it is God's altar and God does not discriminate, people do. What really got to me was the concluding the comment that she made. Unfortunate, there are religious people in the world that fail to grasp what Jesus is all about. Hopefully, she will find a church like ours that does not discriminate, accepts others as they are, and focuses on Jesus.

Jesus transforms conventional expectations and challenges the status quo. Jesus breaks open the boundaries where the chosen people rejected other people. The Samaritan was despised

because the Jews feared contaminating their privileged status. When Jesus associated with a Samaritan, it was an obvious violation of the restriction against contact of what is perceived to be an inferior race. But Jesus' perspective is that the despised Samaritan is your neighbor. Jesus also breaks open the gender boundaries where it is forbidden for a Rabi to talk openly with a woman in public. Jesus further breaks open the boundaries of sin and punishment. Notice his attitude toward the sinner. The woman had a total of 5 different husbands and is now with a man outside of marriage. The woman leads a sinful life. Jesus does not judge her or condemn her. Jesus leads people on a spiritual journey, a new experience, a whole new purpose. Through Christ we see the worth of a woman. He gives women a chance. He sees the possibilities within her and discovers her value as a person. For Christ there is neither male or female, both are dear to God.

The woman at the well bore witness to what she heard. With excitement and enthusiasm, she invited people to come and see. Her testimony stirred up the community with the invitation to come to Jesus. What will become of the church if each generation slips further away from the spiritual realm? The church is challenged to do what Jesus did – break through manmade boundaries instead of constructing them and lead the world to the spiritual realm of Jesus.

In the Scripture, the woman that discovered Jesus was so full of excitement that the news of his arrival spread fast and a multitude of people came to Jesus. In the real life example, a woman is rejected by church leadership. There is a religion that omits the fact that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. The problem is not organized religion; the problem is the leadership of it. Jesus does not discriminate against women and neither should the church. The answer is not to escape from organized religion; the answer is for organized religion to come to Jesus.