

O Lord, Open our eyes to behold your presence.

O Lord, Open our ears, to hear your voice.

O Lord, Open our hearts, to receive your love.

Amen

I find my take on this Gospel, different from other sermons I researched. When I first considered this reading of the woman at the well, I thought, why are all of the women in our readings thought of so poorly? They all seem to exhibit the “wrong” behaviors. It’s not unlike high school, where boys can do whatever they want, but girls get the bad reputations.

But, as I read it several times, the message coming to me was; “how do we treat each other?”

It seemed to me, as the story takes shape, this woman was bullied. This is a common and sometimes overused term in our world today, but if you look at the signs:

She did things that were deemed unacceptable or different than what others would do...outside of what's "normal" or

She is ostracized by others.

She travels to the well alone, when the other women walk together, to socialize.

No one listens to her.

Signs in this story clearly indicate that she is not connected to others in a deep, meaningful way. Actions she has taken make them stay away from her.

When you think of middle school or high school and you think of those treated unkindly –

They are different – for whatever reason.

They are nerdy.

They dress different.

They have different beliefs.

It doesn't really matter – what does matter is that someone decides they are not worthy of being treated well. They are to be picked on and set apart from everyone else.

Is this what is happening to the woman? Are all people staying away because one person has decided she is not

worthy? We don't know this part of the story, but if we draw parallels to actions we see today, I believe this is the case.

In this story, the woman is alone at the well and then Jesus talks to her. She is surprised! Why is he talking to her, when no one talks to her. She asks of him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me a woman of Samaria?". Again, she is surprised he is talking to her. Imagine our ostracized middle schooler – when someone reaches out to him or her. He or she is surprised, and likely, skeptical that someone would engage.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "give me a drink", you would have asked him and he would have given you living water". She is still in disbelief and is sarcastic when she says, "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living

water?” She doesn’t believe he would help her or give her water. She likely believes another shoe will drop and he will, like the others, find a way to ostracize or humiliate her again.

It’s when he admits that he knows something about her that she realizes he is a prophet. It is when he admits he knows something about her that she sees it’s ok to believe in him.

For the middle schooler, it’s that the one reaching out acknowledging that he or she is different, but it is ok. It is as though they might say, “I know you are different, it’s ok. You are safe with me”.

At this point, our middle school friend, lets his guard down and trusts the person reaching out is being honest and true in connecting with him. It is the same with the woman.

At this point the disciples come back – and while they are surprised Jesus is talking to her, they don't say anything. It's like all of those by-standers see the good middle-schooler taking the stand and are waiting to see what will happen.

This is also when the woman realizes that Jesus is the Savior. At this point she runs back to the city to tell people what she has seen. And now, they listen to her – and believe her. It's as though Jesus is the captain of the football team and the middle schooler who was ostracized, is now ok to talk to because the popular person talked to him.

They believe she has seen the Savior and that it is Jesus. Jesus' disciples ask him if he has eaten. Jesus response is, "I have food to eat that you do not know about". "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work".

Jesus is fed spiritually by helping the woman – and helping others believe.

Jesus is our good middle school student will be fed by giving comfort to our ostracized child. By giving of a friendship, our good middle schooler, or captain of the football team, is fed by ensuring that everyone feels welcome and has a place.

Maybe Jesus is the camp counselor who helps the lonely child feel better. Maybe he is the school safety officer watching over those that feel picked on. Maybe Jesus is the big sister watching over a little sister who just got to high school.

So, what's our lesson? What should we reflect on here? Particularly in our season of Lent. Who, in your world are those ostracized? What can you do about it? What will you do about

it? Even if it's one person, can you make that person feel better about their world?

I have a colleague who does drive me crazy. She is very insecure and worries about what she is not included in. She worries that our boss doesn't value her as much as the rest of us. She overthinks when she is not included. She talks too much due to her insecurity. (I will say, she is good at what she does and a needed member of the team). But the team is frustrated often by needing to serve this insecurity to make her feel better.

I will pause the next time I am frustrated. I will think about my message. What can I say in the discussion that can help dispel her concerns so conversations can continue productively? How can I work with my team members to set up

systems to help prevent her feeling of being separated? And, what ideas can I give my manager to supportively address her insecurities.

This will not only help her feel connected but feed me, as Jesus was fed, with something different than food, but rather my connection to God.

If each of us supports one person – what kind of world can we have?

Amen