

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Well, that was some gospel reading. Good thing we all have no place to go right now, and, frankly, you all could have walked away if Dr. Jordan being Jesus was more than you could handle. But, really, sharing that story with you via Livestream is probably one of the better ways to experience the story in the 21st century.

You see, the setting of today's story was at a well. While, to us, the well might seem like a functional place to get water, the well was so much more than that in Jesus' time. As my colleague Pastor Tim Brown reminds us, in the Hebrew Scriptures, wells are not just for water. The well was a place to meet. A place to share news, a place to get news, and a place where the encounters between a man and a woman would, regularly, end in marriage. It was the internet of the day. It was a place for breaking news and for swiping right.

Yet, this particular well was also located at an important fork in the road. And, it was not the cool part of the day when they met. In contrast to Nicodemus who came under darkness to see Jesus last Sunday, today, this Samaritan woman was out at one of the hottest times of day. And, she probably was out there because she had self-imposed social isolation. In her interaction with Jesus we learn why she might have been self-isolating. Perhaps she self-isolated because of her many husbands. Maybe she had been thrown to the side by multiple men because she was undesirable or because she couldn't birth a child, which was a perfectly valid reason for divorce. Maybe she lost so many husbands due to death that she was thought to be bad luck if she was married again. Maybe the man she was living with was far too old or too young to be with her. Regardless of the situation, in Jesus' time, being without a husband and probably without any children put her in an incredibly vulnerable situation.

You see, the primary economic unit in Jesus' time was the family. Without a husband she had no economic support, no legal protections, and, based on her self-imposed social isolation, she probably had no social support. This woman was vulnerable. This woman was desperate. This woman was trying to survive. And, so, even if it meant that she needed to haul herself to the well at the hottest of time of day to avoid the snickers, sneers, and side comments, well then, she'd make it work so that she could live another day.

And while this self-imposed social isolation might seem odd, the truth is, this isolation is not an ancient problem; rather, it's an everyday thing. It's the same social isolation that people who are divorced feel that they need to take because they just don't want to be in public and field endless questions about where the partner has gone. It's the social isolation that happens after someone's embarrassment becomes too much to bear. It's the social isolation that comes from struggling with addiction or coping with a terminal diagnosis. It's the social isolation that minorities have to put in place to keep themselves safe and comfortable when the world tells them they're too gay, too black, too foreign, too old, too young, too fat, too different, and too much to handle. It's the social isolation that comes from shame. It comes with depression. It comes from the voices inside our head that are hell-bent on keeping us closeted, anxious, and alone.

And that woman at the well, she knew that that feeling, so she isolated herself. But, Jesus, well, Jesus ruined everything. There, Jesus sat in the beating sun and burst her bubble. There, Jesus met her right where she was—physically, mentally, and spiritually. God was present with her in the midst of all of all that messiness, in all that uncertainty, and in all that emotion to comfort her, to provide her with living water, and to breakdown the social-cultural barriers that had long divided “his people” and “her people.” Jesus came to restore her to fullness, to community, and to life. Jesus came to trade-in her social isolation to simply survive and instead, gave her a thriving and restored relationship. A relationship built on honesty. A relationship built on acceptance. A relationship built on love.

And from that interaction, this woman became the first missionary in John's gospel. She was the first person to go running and to tell of the way Jesus breaks down

barriers. She ran into town to tell of her experience. And, in sharing her experience, unity was birthed, life was discovered, and those social interactions were restored. And, so I wonder: in this time when we are practicing increased social distancing, how might we find ways to avoid social isolation? And not just social isolation for ourselves, but how might we be a part of responding to social isolation as it festers and grows in our communities? How might we notice where we've become divided, socially separated, and distant; and then, how might we allow God's living water to bring abundant life?

It's odd to me that the day that we are distant—you there and me here—that we talk about social isolation. At the same time, this is probably the best time. After all, we have the time to evaluate our relationships and reach out to those we've been distant with. Maybe it's a phone call, a text, or a grabbing coffee via webcam. Perhaps it's a child drawing a picture to tell their janitors and their teachers how much they appreciate them. Maybe is reaching out to that friend who has become distant or to that family member you had a blow-out argument with last time. Perhaps we all need to simply recognize that this time of increased distance is for the benefit of the most vulnerable to be in relationship with us more robustly. Maybe, just maybe, this is our opportunity to find new and creative ways to bridge the racial, economic, social, and political divide. Because, now that we're all in this together we have come to realize how deeply interconnected humankind has always been.

So, friends, you're probably scrolling through Facebook or in the bathroom, so I'm going to wrap this up. Today's gospel reminds us that far too often we self-impose or find another in self-imposed social isolation. Yet, our God is one of relationship. Our God comes to meet us in those messy, difficult, and overwhelming moments to remind us that we are not alone. Our God comes to give us living water that flows and moves among us and through us, even when we practice social distancing. For in the waters of baptism, we were claimed as God's beloved child. And there is absolutely nothing that we *have* said, done, or thought or that we *will* say, do, or think that can destroy that love. So, today we are given an opportunity to be reconciled to God and to be a reconciling force in the world. A force that recognizes our inter-connectivity, a force that notices opportunities for renewal, and a force that is enlivened with God's living water. Amen.