

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
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3rd Sunday after Lent

Water Cooler Conversations about and with Jesus

The ability to converse freely and openly and honestly with strangers comes to some of us as quite an easy exercise. Why shouldn't I talk with my neighbor in the supermarket checkout or waiting in line for an oil change or at the bus stop or in line at the bank? For others, such conversations are unusual and sometimes threatening or difficult.

For those who have a staff room or coffee lounge or water cooler at work, how do you feel when you come to talk with fellow employees about the state of the world or the state of your life? How much do you open up to those in your department, in your office, in your research area, in your line of work? There may be talk of the latest TV programs, the latest international or local news, the latest fashions or relationships, but would you choose to put your two cents worth in or do you mainly listen?

For those who are retired, what did you used to be like at work, and are you the same now or changed? For those who have changed jobs, or who are currently changing jobs, did the job change in any way affect how you spoke with those around you?

Psychologists have developed various models over the centuries to talk about why some of us talk more easily in many situations than others. The Greek physician Hippocrates and the Roman physician Galen spoke of melancholy, phlegmatic, sanguine and choleric based on supposed balance and/or imbalance of bodily fluids influencing personality temperaments. In the twentieth century Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, began exploring the concepts of introversion and extraversion in the context of Personality Types, that is, getting more energy from being alone or from being with other people. Later, others such as Katherine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers developed a series of tests building upon Jung's work to help people understand, if they tended to introversion or extraversion, feeling or thinking, intuition or sensation, judging or perceiving. Of course, we all do some of all of these, the main point was to help us understand our differences in perspective so we would help one another rather than fight with one another. Others have also proposed other ways of considering our differences, and helping us to talk to each other. Because talking to each

other, and actually having a dialogue is something akin to a miracle, whether a stranger or someone you think you know intimately. Another personality type indicator is called the Enneagram, with nine types rather than the sixteen of the Myers Briggs Indicator.

Rather than explaining these personality types and taking the rest of the time talking about how we are different, you can search the internet and find some helpful info or ask others what they have done to learn about themselves and others. This often helps in marriage as well.

If we don't have a sense of how amazing one person encountering another linguistically and having some sense of what they mean, then it is unlikely we will appreciate the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. First of all, the Jewish people and the Samaritans didn't get along for over 700 years since the dividing of the kingdom between Solomon's son Rehoboam and most of the tribes of Israel went north and proclaimed a new homeland and capital. On top of this, a Jewish man of some station would not speak to a woman, let alone a stranger across the cultural and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans.

So the fact that Jesus even asked a simple request of a drink of water plunged both him and the woman into the deepest of spiritual conversations. I wonder if she would have simply given him a drink of water from her bucket, whether there would have been any significant encounter at all.

Instead, the conversation moves from whether or not they should be having a conversation to the identity and spiritual history of their two peoples. It moves to self-identification by both Jesus and the woman. It moves from a simple drink of water to spiritual thirst. It moves from cultural and religious differences to the person of the Messiah, and the spiritual relationship with God which is possible through him. It moves from the woman partially telling about herself to Jesus making clear he knows about her already through his prophetic gift. It moves from the disciples wondering that Jesus would even talk with her, to this woman becoming the first evangelist in this area who brings others to the one who told her all about her life and what she really needs.

All of this starts with a simple willingness to talk. Whether we have the psychological predisposition to want to talk with others or not, the apostle John, who wrote of this encounter, encourages us to get past whatever is

stopping us from talking about Jesus to begin to have the freedom to talk about him again.

For some, talking about your spiritual and religious experiences is a vulnerable and intimate thing. Yet it is exactly this type of risk in conversation that John encourages us to consider and to do. For as we tell others of how God has offered us the living waters, the way to eternal life, the answer to our deepest yearnings, then God can work through us and our sharing to bring about positive change in others.

It's not about being so proud about our own spiritual journey or religious understanding that we have to tell others. It's about feeling free to share that which is inner treasure, the core of who we are. It's not about being together enough or mature enough to share. The woman at the well was quite broken, in many areas of her life, just as we are. Yet she was still willing to share with others. Again, the focus was not on her, but on Jesus.

We know some of the words she said. We can imagine some of the other words: "Come meet someone who told me about my life, who knows my hurt, who loves me. Meet this man who has taught me about worshipping God honestly, spiritual worship that really connects with life. He doesn't just pretend with religion. He has the water for a thirsty soul, food for a hungry heart." And many came to Jesus, and gave their lives to him.

But enough about ancient history. What about you? Do you feel you are able to share about your faith and encounter with God? We know God is already on the move helping many people in our lives to know Jesus and love him. But in this Lenten season (and beyond), we are challenged to share with someone we have not shared with about our faith and trust in God.

If you don't feel free to share, whether it is too personal or intimate or vulnerable, ask God to help you share. You are the disciples of today here. You are the vessels God fills up to pour out to others. You are the future of the faith here in this city. Sometimes we say it's our children that are the future and that's true to some degree, but the fact is that **we**, each one of us, need to understand why all of this makes sense, why all of this is so important, and you know I'm not talking about the building.

Why are you here? Why is St. David's your spiritual home (or not)? What drew you to this place when you first came? What has been lost since that time that you feel is an important part of who we are? How can you make this place better, with your gifts and abilities?

These are questions all of you will be asked in your home in the next couple months. The elders will come and ask you to talk about your spiritual journey, specifically as it relates to this congregation. We would very much appreciate your time and energy to consider these questions seriously.

Of course, the more important question is "Where are you today with God?" Are you hiding as they were in the garden after they rebelled against God's ways? Are you simply distracted with so many of life's other activities? Are you opening yourself anew to God and Jesus' way? Are you inviting others to come and consider what the Lord can do for them and their lives, as you share what God is doing in your life?

You know I wear the clerical collar here on Sundays. I am called a Minister, and I have been set aside for that role. But all of us minister. All of us reach out with whatever is inside, whether we are crabby, or amazed, or perplexed or full of love and joy, whether tired, or full of life, bored or creative, wherever we are, we reach out with what is inside us. It just naturally pours out. The supernatural does the same. God can work through us as we share, little by little, all that God is doing in our lives.

Let us pray.