

Sermon: Finding God in the Dark Pt. 2(John 4:1-30)  
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March 17, 2019  
First Christian – St. Joseph, MO

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It's 2004, the year when Frank Warren prints up 3000 self-addressed postcards with basic instructions inviting people to take the card and to share, in some artful way, one of their secrets on the card and then mail it back to him. He passes them out to strangers on the streets in D.C. and to his surprise, the cards start coming back to him...with secrets on them. Confessions. Some of them silly, some of them disturbing...some of them profound. And the cards continue to pour into today. To date, he's received over a half-million secrets. The effort, now known as PostSecret, has birthed a website and multiple books. Here a few examples of actual secrets strangers have mailed to Frank. (Check out the Post Secret website [here](#).)

What secret would you share on your postcard? What is something about you that no one else knows? Something you think others might judge you for...if they only knew. We all have secrets of course. We all have parts of ourselves that others don't see, or don't know about us.

One of my favorite phrases: Don't judge my story by the chapter you walked in on.

Don't judge my story by the chapter you walked in on. Amen? I wish we could get shirts with that emblazoned across the front. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to say that to somebody. But I wonder...how many times have others in my life wished they could have said that to me?

What about you? Do you know that feeling of people in your life knowing just "this much" about you and what you've been through and yet they think they know you, they think they know what's wrong with you --they think they are in a position to judge you?

Are there times in your life when you wish you could have said to someone "Don't judge my story by the chapter you walked in on."

I wonder how often we might imagine the character of this woman at the well saying this very thing to the people of her village. The people who judge her, who condemn her, who whisper about her multiple marriages behind her back, who think they know her story. Here she is a Samaritan, an outcast to the Jews, who appears to be an outcast even amongst her own people. Perhaps this is why she comes to the well alone, at noon. The height of the sun and the height of the day's heat. Why does she not come with others, in the coolness of the morning or the evening hour? Why not come with the other women of the village, and share in some time of fellowship, away from other chores and the demands of family and children?

Does she come because no one will journey with her – those in her village who judge and shame her because of her background, her multiple marriages? Or does she come alone because she is sick and tired of their stares, their whispers behind her back, their judgment and scorn, thinking they know all about her life and what she has done?

If she could speak to the other people of the village, those who judge her, I think I know what she might say: Don't judge my story by the chapter you walked in on.

She might say the same to countless preachers throughout the years who have chosen to think the worst of this woman. They have chosen to see this as a story about shame and repentance. They've declared her a sinner, immoral, a woman of loose living, lustful, and promiscuous. Might I suggest that these interpretations may say more about the mind of the preacher than they do about this character of John's narrative?

These same preachers will tell us that this woman is empty inside, unfulfilled, spiritually vacant. Thirsting for something. Where do they find all this in the reading? Yes, she's thirsting for something alright: water! That's why she's come to the well, the same as Jesus.

Nowhere in the story does Jesus question her morality, demand repentance, ask her to confess, or talk about sin at all. Hers is not a story of scandal, but tragedy. This woman, who has been married five times, has likely known loss, divorce, abandonment. She is a woman living in a patriarchal culture just trying survive. She is living in a dark place, shunned by others, and Jesus invites her to step into the light. And I wonder if she helps him do the same.

Consider this: They both come to this well seeking the same thing: water. John tells us that Jesus is trying to escape some of his critics, and perhaps she is doing the same. They both come with needs. She has a need to be seen, to be treated with respect. He has a need to be heard, for someone to finally "get" what he's been trying to tell them and to respond. Yes, he crosses gender and ethnic and religious boundaries to talk to this outsider...but doesn't she do the same thing?

And in their theological discussion about "living water" she gives as good as she gets. I have to imagine Jesus thinking, "Finally, finally, someone willing to explore the message I have to offer."

In a sense, they both come from places of darkness, and in each other they find some light. They both offer each other presence. They are both willing to listen to each other's story. And in the light of their conversation, Jesus offers her the "living water," the chance to step into the light of God's love, to step into the eternity of God's love in the here and now.

And she is so moved by this encounter, by this person who doesn't come to judge her, but to see her, see her whole story, and offer her a chance to step out of the darkness and into the light, that she leaves her water jar behind and runs off to tell others of

Jesus. And because of her, John tells, many others come to see the light, too. By the end of the story, this woman is no longer just a nameless Samaritan. We see her as theologian, missionary, evangelist, one who offers and shares the good news of eternal life in a way that changes lives. All because of this encounter with Jesus where he was willing to be truly present. Because of the way they are present to each other and willing to learn each other's story. This is true relationship. This is the relationship we have with God, in love.

God doesn't judge our story by one chapter...because God knows the whole story, secrets and all...and loves us....not in spite of what we have been through, but because of what we've been through. God knows the darkness of our lives because God is with us in the dark. I wonder of if by the end of our text today, this woman is not only surprised to find that Jesus knows her whole story, but that there is also a chapter of own story that she kept hidden from herself. A chapter in which she realizes a need to find the true light – the light that can only be found from God through Jesus.

If Jesus met you at the well, what would he know about you? What might he tell you about yourself? How do you imagine others in your life would treat you...if they knew the real you? What about others here at church? What would this church be like if we really knew each other, knew the secrets...saw the real darkness we've each had to wade through? What if we really worked to know more and share more about each other than just the chapter we walked in on?

What might God's Spirit see in you that others have not discovered yet? What might God's spirit help you to bring to light about yourself, if only you are willing to be seen, be known, and enter the light that Christ offers?

Let us pray.