

When I was a kid, my family used to visit my father's parents in Scottsburg, Virginia—a tiny crossroads village just east of South Boston and Halifax Virginia. My grandparents were tenant farmers there. They lived in a little house beside the tobacco and corn fields and they had no running water. So one of my indelible memories is of my grandfather who, every morning, would walk about a quarter mile, carrying two buckets, which he would fill with water from a hand pump, which was out in the yard of the farm owner. I would sometimes walk with him and help. The water got pretty heavy on the walk back to the house and you had to be careful not to slosh it out. And I was trying to think if we talked while we walked. I probably asked a question or two. But I don't remember conversations. I didn't quite know how to talk with him—Granddaddy was living a life that was completely unfamiliar to me. And his deep southeast Virginia brogue easily reminded me of that.

I haven't thought about this in a long time and the only reason this memory resurfaced is because of the Gospel reading about *walking to a well*. Of course, that *used to be* something everybody did to get water, in some way or another. So, *Jesus* walked to the well. And a *Samaritan woman* walked to the well. And *a conversation happened* there that day. In fact, it just might be the *longest single conversation* recorded in the Bible.

And it is quite an *unusual* conversation...that is not only *hard* for the reader *to follow*...but was also hard for the Samaritan woman. She *misunderstood* Jesus and at one point tried to *change the subject*. Jesus spoke to her of deep spiritual matters almost to the point of sounding cryptic but also spoke to her very personally. It was an unusual and awkward conversation for her--which was made even more so because the custom of that time was that *Jewish men* such as Jesus just did not speak to *Samaritan women*. *Why was he even speaking to her?* And another layer of awkwardness is a subtle cue at the beginning of the story. Why was the woman at the well at *noon*? My grandfather and I never walked to the well at noon—you went in the morning to be ready for the day and you also avoided the *heat* of the day. So why was she there then? Unless perhaps she was hoping to avoid the other villagers in the morning who might shun her? So this whole story of a conversation is layered up with awkwardness.

It has been tempting for some interpreters of this story to be critical of the Samaritan woman—to blame her for being unable to keep up with the conversation because she was a *woman*...or because her life was *disordered*. But if you notice, even when the *disciples of Jesus* appeared and were astonished that this conversation was happening, *they also proceeded to misunderstand Jesus* too when they were worried about getting Jesus to eat. So, really, what the story reveals is just how easy it is for *anyone* to misunderstand Jesus.

We should actually give the woman some credit—because despite her misunderstandings and evasion—she did hang in there with Jesus in a pretty challenging conversation. She didn't withdraw. She kept giving it a go. And each response became another opportunity for more conversation...until finally...very unexpectedly...she had something of a revelation. A “God moment” happened to her. Jesus saw deeply into her complicated, messy life and yet he continued to talk to her respectfully, all the while inviting the conversation to go deeper and deeper. This finally moved her so much that when she left and returned home she talked enthusiastically about Jesus to the very villagers that she had apparently been avoiding at the well. Fortunately, Jesus stayed in her village another two days for more conversations.

One thing we could say about this story is *just how important conversation can be*. And it sure doesn't have to be some kind of perfect conversation—it can twist and turn all over the place, as conversations do. But it matters if there is respect, a willingness to know and be known, to talk *with* and not just talk *at* someone. *And you never know when a conversation can end up being a “God moment”*. Especially a conversation with *another person*...but also the kinds of conversations which are also possible with a *book*. Or a *silence indoors or outdoors*—which isn't always merely silent. “God moments” are moments which, in a sense, could never be *expected*. And yet like Jesus, who *initiated* a conversation which wasn't even supposed to have happened--in a very real way the same thing could be said for us. *Conversations can become “God moments” for us because God wants that*. And it is quite an unexpected gift and a grace.