

John Chapter 4

When Jesus decides to start a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, he crosses a variety of social barriers. Perhaps the most obvious barrier he crosses is the cultural one. Jews and Samaritans hate each other. The hatred extends back many generations, but it is so strong that even the woman points out Jesus' faux pas.

Closely tied to the cultural barrier is the religious barrier, since these two cultures are defined by their religions. As a Christian today, you might feel a similar tension (though hopefully without any hint of hatred or feelings of superiority) when interacting with a Muslim in traditional clothing or a Buddhist monk.

Additionally, in Jesus' time, the barrier between male and female is much stronger than we might recognize. It could be considered scandalous for a man to openly speak alone with a woman who is not his own wife.

Jesus breaks through all of these barriers, but he doesn't ignore them. He doesn't shy away from the fact that he is breaking the mold. Instead, he fully acknowledges the social barriers and he does not hide the fact that he has broken them.

It's also worth noting that Jesus is the one who starts the conversation. He asks for the woman's help without any prompting. It's not as if he is thrown into this uncomfortable situation and he makes the best of it. Jesus seeks out this interaction.

Do you ever intentionally put yourself into potentially uncomfortable situations? Do you reach out to those who probably don't expect you to?

Notice what Jesus does when he points out the truth of her five previous husbands and her current relationship. He is honest about the situation. He doesn't try to downplay it as if it's not important. But Jesus never condemns her, either. He doesn't overlook her situation, or give any impression that he condones it, he simply states the facts as they are.

This can be a tricky area to navigate when we have friends with opinions that contradict what we know from Scripture. What Jesus teaches us in his interaction with the Samaritan woman is that it doesn't have to be black and white. We often ask ourselves, "Should I tell him his actions are wrong, or should I give him my approval?" Jesus shows us that we don't have to do either, but we also don't have to pretend like the issue doesn't exist at all.

Jesus states the facts, without judging or approving them, and he lets the woman come to her own conclusions. If your friend wants advice from you about a particular situation, he or she may ask you, but it's not your job to approve or condemn their actions. Later, Jesus will remind us that the Holy Spirit convicts the heart. Your job is simply to be a friend and share the love of Jesus.

When the disciples come back to where they left Jesus, they are surprised to see who Jesus is talking to. They probably even act a little awkward as they approach. This just happens to be the exact time when she takes off back into town. She has grown comfortable talking to Jesus alone, but his group of friends are clearly not as excited about all the social barriers that have been crossed in their absence.

The people in the town know they are hated by Jews for their religious beliefs, and the feeling is mutual. Yet, they come running to see the Christ, based on this woman's words. They're interested in seeing him for themselves, even though he is a Jew, and they know that Jews have completely rejected them.

This is how Jesus still is today. Though Christians often discard those with different religious beliefs, Jesus is still drawing them. Jesus still reaches out to them without condemnation. When we, his followers, are able to be like this Samaritan woman, we can be a part of it all.

After his time with these Samaritans, Jesus returns to Galilee. Remember a few chapters ago, the Galileans didn't really care who he was. They weren't interested. Now, however, they are excited to see him return. Why? What changed since his last arrival in Galilee?

The wedding.

The last thing the Galileans remember about Jesus is that he was the guy who provided the good wine at the wedding.

Remember, Jesus didn't turn the water into wine in order to get people to like him. But when you become known as a person who keeps the party going, it makes people want you around. Jesus made sure the guests at the wedding were able to enjoy themselves longer, and it earned him favor with those who heard about it. How different that is from the common idea that Christians aren't much fun to be around.

It is after earning this reputation that the official asks Jesus to heal his son. Because Jesus was known for being a person who could help, people began coming to him. So,

Jesus continues to build a reputation in Galilee for being a person that can be trusted. Continuous acts of kindness and being available to offer help is a great way to open the hearts of those around us.

Are you known as someone your friends and neighbors can go to when they need something? Do people trust you enough to open up to you with their needs and troubles? Find ways to become that person for those in your circles of influence.