

Kimberly O'Brien, Sermon 3/12/23, Jn 4:5-42

Have you ever been so passionate and intent about something that you forgot to eat?

Maybe you were so into a project, or having so much fun, time flew right past lunch?

Sometimes when we get into something really great it seems time loses its meaning

Time can stand still or fly by

Without us being conscious of it

Losing our sense of time can be a sign that we're into something incredible,

Tapping into something both within and outside of ourselves

Perhaps on the threshold of transformation

Some call these liminal spaces

Richard Rohr describes this space as, "where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That's a good space where genuine newness can begin."

Newness... creativity... passion... transformation

These are also words we use to describe encounters with the divine

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I invited you to identify with one of the characters in the gospel story today

For me the character I identify most with...

Love, and admire... is the woman

The woman in today's gospel story seems to find herself in a liminal space as she encounters Jesus

We hear several labels for parts of her identity throughout this story

Samaritan

Woman

Unwed

Divorced

And there are other aspects of her identity that are demonstrated throughout the story

Courageous and curious

Believer in Christ

Witness and disciple

But perhaps most importantly for her

And for each one of us

Is her identity as a beloved child of God

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This story is fascinating because it's so unpredictable

Jesus was a Jew, and Jews didn't go to Samaria

Jews and Samaritans had been strong enemies for about the last 700 years

But Jesus discerned that they must go there / /

Jewish men, particularly teachers, did not talk to unknown women

But Jesus, a Jewish teacher, engaged this woman at the well / /

Jesus didn't need water -- the disciples just left to get snacks

And women didn't usually go to the well for water during midday

It's hot, and they preferred to draw water in the mornings and evenings

Culturally, women also did this together

It was like a social event where they would catch up a bit and support one another.

But this woman goes to the well alone at noon / / /

So just within the first three verses of this story we enter a place of curiosity, wonder and awe as we are transported outside of what is considered common, to a place of newness

Then Jesus asks her for a drink / / /

He exacerbates her confusion of his violation of social norms by then telling her that HE has living water... flowing, fresh everlasting water

But there he sits beside the well

Jesus doesn't even have a bucket, and he just told her that he needed a drink AND he has living water

Anyone in their right mind would smile, step back, and get water later because something strange is happening here

But this is the thing about liminal spaces / / /

They befuddle us, shift our conscious awareness,

Change our ability to perceive reality, and take us to someplace deeper

Liminal spaces seem to shift our consciousness away from what's happening on the surface

toward a deeper place where transformation can occur

/ / /

So in spite of common custom and her best judgement,

The woman stays

She remains curious

She engages Jesus

/ / /

Within the conversation Jesus brings up her marital status,

Not in judgement of her,

but in a way of revealing more of himself

He shows himself as seeing and knowing all things

Deepening the mystery and drawing the woman into relationship with him further

The woman recognizes Jesus as a prophet

And gets to the heart of the conflict between Jews and Samaritans

And perhaps the heart of the conflict we experience within our relationships today

Where is God?

Where can I access God?

Where can I experience God?

If I encounter God here or this way...

then can you encounter God there or that way?

/ / /

Jesus shatters both the Jewish and Samaritan answers to these questions

The hour is coming

The time is near

When worshipping God won't depend on where you are

Or if you do it properly

Worshipping God will depend on spirit and truth

And relationship /     /

Jesus' words "God is spirit" changes everything

Because God is unbound to any people or place

Jesus' presence is changing and shifting people's perception of God's presence

God is inbreaking, here, and now

In this liminal space

Through Jesus the Christ

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As per usual, the disciples return and bring us back to reality

They disrupt the liminal space where Jesus and the woman lost track of culture and regulations and what "should" be happening

But it's too late

The divine disruptive work has been done

the woman has been transformed by this experience

Everything has changed

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Forgetting the water and her bucket

Forgetting her status as an outcast in her town

Forgetting the social norms she's lived by all of her life

The woman raced back to the city and became a witness

She proclaimed, as the newest disciple of Jesus

“Come and see”

/ / /

Liminal spaces seem increasingly rare within our culture,

We have become proficient in holding expectations and social normative behaviors

As we focus on time

Schedule

The plan and

Productivity

Can you imagine being delayed by two whole days as Jesus and the disciples did in Samaria?

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Our way of living leaves little room for God to interrupt us

For God to disrupt our busy days

And for us to be transformed

/ / /

Several years ago I started paying more attention to disruptions

I'm a recovering type-A person who had much rigor around schedule and plans

My children have assisted me greatly in breaking this habit 😊

I hated disruption / / /

until I changed my perspective

I began to see disruption as opportunity

I began to be curious and more open in the midst of disruption

Some people call this “flow” or “mindfulness”

But I realized something incredible within the disruptions in my life

They opened me to a new and transformative space

Beautiful things happened there

These disruptions created space for God to enter my life

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As you go about your week and continue to reflect upon this gospel and whatever character you resonate with this time

Consider how they experienced disruption

Consider how they remained curious

Consider how they opened themselves to something new

And witness how they experienced the presence of God

/ / /

We, like the woman, have many competing identities

May we prioritize our identity as a beloved child of God above all

May we engage our passions in a way that causes us to lose track of time

May we allow disruptions into our lives with curiosity and openness

May we embrace newness and creativity

May this *way of being* open a liminal space within our lives

May we experience divine transformation in unexpected places and times...and

May we have the courage to witness and proclaim

“Come and see!”

Amen.