

DRAMA by Reuben Cook and Meg O'Connor

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25 The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

26 Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you – I am he.'

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?' 30 They came out of the town and made their way towards him.....

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Annie Johnson Flint wrote a long time ago

**Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in the way
He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died
He has no help but our help to bring them to His side.
We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message, given in word and deed;
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?
What if our hands are busy with other work than His?
What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongue is speaking of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him or welcome His return?**

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The one thing Annie left out was ears – sometimes the most effective witness we offer in Jesus' name is our willingness to listen, without judgement or giving trite answers.

1. THE ORDINARY EXPERIENCES OF LIFE

What could be more ordinary than Jesus sitting down having a rest? We read how he'd left Judea because they were making odious comparisons about who was the more successful baptizer, Jesus or John the Baptist - such a 21st century thing to do. He chose to go through Samaria

And beside this ordinary situation of Jesus resting, set the ordinary circumstance of a woman coming to get water. His friends had gone to get something from the local fast food outlet. Bible scholars point out it's likely that this woman, whose name we never find out, was getting water at midday in order to avoid the judgemental whispers and sneers of her fellow water-gatherers. Water collecting normally took place in the coolness of morning or evening.

She, as the story unfolds is not a good girl in terms of her relationships. She'd drifted from husband to husband until she's finally living with a guy she's not married to – how contemporary is that? Of course we know nothing of this at the beginning.

What we do know is that this was a circumstance, a situation that arose out of two people doing ordinary things. No doubt you can recall some of the great conversations you've had or significant meetings you've had that took place in what appeared to be the ordinary circumstances of your days.

I'd like us to pray that the Lord would lead us to more situations where we can share our experience of Jesus, or listen to others share their story so that we can take the example of Jesus from this passage – just being open to him. I'm sure many of you are. When we get to pray through the updated Church Directory next month that's what we'll be praying for you - could you write that down please Trudy? I just don't have enough of those conversations these days; I feel I spend too much time with Christians and not enough with not yet Christians. Is that your experience?

2. WHEN GOD SPEAKS TO US

Lots of people have the erroneous notion that spiritual experiences occur only when we're looking for God. As it turns out most people weren't looking for God when God met them. They were minding their own business; doing this or that and were surprised. Surely when the woman went to get water she wasn't expecting to meet God in Jesus, the Messiah.

I had an experience a bit like this last week. I was watching the end of a film and at the very end there was a comment which I felt was the whisper of the Holy Spirit to me.

And another thing I've learned about God speaking to us: the location of divine encounters (and it pains me to say this) is rarely at church. Sometime you'll comment that you enjoyed a service or you got something out of it. But you don't often report to me that you have a dramatic face to face, one on one encounter with the Lord. I wish you did – I pray for this. Do you?

Sometimes the Lord speaks through beauty or a breath-taking sight around us. We were at the Chasm waterfall on the way to Milford Sound many years ago when a bus load of American tourists arrived. I was standing near one when she looked down and said 'Oh my God.' I didn't unpack with her what she meant but I can recall experiences that have prompted me to express a similar thought. I was in a kayak with Trudy's brother Les on the Pororai River near Punakaiki - it was absolutely silent, the native bush came the to the water's edge; to me it was like being at the very beginning of creation and inspired me to worship our Creator God.

It could be on a retreat, hope it would be, but you could be nabbed where you work or at the kitchen sink (where you also work) or feeding your animals. The Lord has, in my observation, the strangest sense of occasion, an odd idea of location – but who am I to tell Jesus where and when he ought to intrude into someone's life? Surely beside Jacob's well with a person who was carrying heavier loads than a water jar or two is a surprising location – but only to us.

3. THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF IT ALL

What was Jesus doing talking to a woman, a Samaritan woman to boot, a Samaritan woman of questionable morals. And from her point of view what's Jesus doing talking to her – a man, a Jew – and asking her for a drink; wrong gender, wrong race, and wrong religion. Yet Jesus initiates conversation with her, asks her to do something for him, engages her – beside a well.

She hadn't come for a Bible study! She wasn't there searching for something deeper in her life. She was there in the most ordinary of everyday tasks that most of the world's women still must do at the beginning of every day: she's drawing water.

Jesus says something to her about water. She replies with, 'Where are you going to get water with no bucket?' Jesus says he's offering her 'living water,' - despite her failures and sad life the story unfolds and eventually....

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She runs all the way back home to tell people, '**Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?**' Then the Samaritans '**came out of the town and made their way towards him.**

She—Samaritan, woman, spouseless—thus becomes the precursor to and the very first of all preachers. She was the first to run and tell everyone about Jesus. And all she meant to do that day was get a bucket of water!

True, Jesus doesn't give her much detailed instruction in the faith. She doesn't seem to have understood much of his enigmatic talk of 'living water' and worship 'in spirit and truth.' But what Jesus *does* is as important as what he *says*. Jesus encounters her, takes her seriously, meets her where she is, calls her—just by his few words—to preach.

She doesn't run home shouting, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. . . .' Things were still too new, too mysterious for that. She left Jesus with a question, 'He can't be the Messiah—can he?'

A hint, a door opened, a light flickered in the dark. It's not everything that Jesus said and did; it's not the whole of the historic faith. But it's a start. It's a question—the question on which all else depends. And it's God's initiative, God's gift to someone who didn't even ask for it, someone who was the 'wrong' person, at the 'wrong' time, and in the 'wrong' place.

Thank God she didn't respond, when Jesus surprisingly greeted her, with 'I'm sorry. I've got water to draw and work to do. My religious meter isn't on just now. See you on the Sabbath, if you want to talk religion.' I'm glad she had the courage to listen, to marvel, to relish the moment, to consider the possibility that she didn't know everything and hadn't seen everything yet. She dared to trust the moment, dared to be engaged by this mysterious stranger, risked letting him move her from encounter to demanding question.

She was moved from encounter with Jesus to a first step, a courageous willingness to be shocked, surprised and intruded upon. She wasn't only a woman willing to be addressed by a strange man whom she didn't know, but also a Samaritan willing to consider the possibility of a Messiah she didn't know.

Who is a Christian? A Christian (at least on this day in the light of our text) is someone who's willing to be open to the possibility that something's afoot, that the living Jesus isn't only puzzling but also revealing, that even though you may not have the time or the inclination to look for God, God in Jesus Christ just might be looking for you!

Keep looking over your shoulder tomorrow wherever you are; whether you take in hand a bucket, a keyboard, a textbook, or a Bible. Something's afoot.

Be ready to meet Jesus; OR be a voice, a hand, a foot, or an ear in his name!

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