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CATALYTIC CONVERSATIONS Michael B. Beough
John 4:7-10, 16-29 November 8, 2009
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This morning we are continuing our series *Unbinding Your Hearts*. For those of you who may be worshipping with us for the first time, we are on an exciting journey learning how to do a better job of sharing our faith. We believe God wants us to reach more people with the love of Jesus Christ.

This past week in our small group discussions we learned that what most new members want is a relationship with God that transforms their lives. One of the most exciting biblical stories of transformation is the story of the woman at the well in John 4.

I get excited when I read it. I never grow tired of reading it. Jesus met a woman at the well and led her to a life-transforming faith.

However, I must be honest with you. I really can't relate to her at all. I don't remember a time when I wasn't a part of the church. I have never been in this woman's shoes or sandals or whatever she had on her feet. I don't know what it is like not to know Jesus and then to know him as Savior and Lord of my life. My faith came with the territory. It was in the air I breathed at home. I did church because my parents took me to church. Then I did church because I liked being with other youth in church. Then I did church because its message finally sunk in. My faith life has been more like a steady hum for 63 years, with some ups and downs, but the tune has never stopped. I get more emotional about it than I used to and especially like being around others who are humming along with me.

I suspect most of you could tell the same story. Most of us in the mainline churches like ours are cradle to grave Christians. We don't understand these sudden conversion things.

Now there is nothing wrong with my faith experience, but it does have one downside.

I am more like the disciples in John 4 than I am like Jesus. I tend to have what I call an insider's attitude. When the disciples found Jesus talking with this woman, they were astonished, it says in verse 27. What in the heck is Jesus doing talking to this ... this woman? This outsider. This stranger. This foreigner. This adulterer!

Martha Grace Reese, the author of *Unbinding Your Heart*, says this insider's attitude is why most of us in mainline churches need our hearts unbound. **Jesus came into the world to transform lives.** He came specifically for people like the well woman. He came to seek and to save the

lost. And he has the power to do that, the love to do that with. And he wants to do it through us.

I think what Jesus shows us in this story is that we have a steep learning curve. We will have to learn how to speak the language of those who don't even know that it is Jesus they need.

Jesus was the master at it, of course. Big surprise, right? Look at how he engaged this woman at the well.

When she showed up, he immediately recognized a need in her. He noticed her. You see, a key to effective evangelism is just noticing. Paying attention. Jesus knew something wasn't quite right. Okay, so this is Jesus and he knows stuff. But anyone observant enough would have reached the same conclusion.

The woman had come to the well at the hottest time of day, when no one else would have been there. Many have speculated about why she came at such a lonely time. Maybe she had a bad reputation for being divorced 5 times. Maybe all of those husbands had died. Maybe it was grief. Maybe it was shame. But something kept her isolated that day. Who knows what? All we know for sure is she wanted to be alone.

But she wasn't alone. Jesus was there. As we say every Sunday, we never go anywhere by accident and all that. And Jesus did the simplest thing. He started a conversation with her. It shocked her because a non-related man was never supposed to talk to a strange woman, much less a Jewish man speaking to a Samaritan woman. Something about getting cooties and losing your favorite status position with God.

Jesus violated all sorts of social and religious taboos, but then what's more important, being well thought of or this woman's soul? We know the answer to that for Jesus, but what about for us? What is more important?

Jesus started up a conversation, and look at what he talked about. Water. He started out by speaking her language. He connected with her immediate need. He started at the ground floor. "I need water," he told her. He asked her for water. Then he made a masterful transition. He told her that he had water to give her, living water. She would never be thirsty again if she drank of his water.

Jesus began by speaking her language. By the end of their conversation, he had spoken to her heart. He had touched the nerve center of her soul. Here was a man who knew all about her troubled life with men, and yet instead of rejection or judgment, he offered her living water. No ordinary man would have been so kind to her. She believed him when he said he was the Messiah. She was so excited she ran off to tell her whole neighborhood about Jesus. "Come see this man. You won't believe it! He

knows all about me and still treats me with dignity. He still believes I am worth something to God.”

And guess what happened? It says that the whole town went out to the well to see Jesus, and many believed in him because of that woman’s testimony (vs. 39).

Have you ever known anyone like this woman, whose life did a 180 when Jesus came along? Whose life was going in one direction and then turned on a dime because someone introduced Jesus to them? I want us to hear from someone like that this morning. Some of you know him. You may not know his story.

(Dave)

Martha Grace Reese says there are lots of Daves out there. Those of us who have always been Christians have to learn how to speak their language. In our worship. In our casual conversations.

The most successful way to bring the transforming love of Christ into their lives, she says, is through personal conversation and invitation. In her research of mainline churches, she discovered that almost 60% of first time worship attenders show up because of a personal invitation. No other reason comes even statistically close. Those that find their way into a transforming relationship with Christ do so because someone cared enough to show them where they could find living water.

We are on a journey here at SBPC asking God to unbind our hearts. We want to do a better job of bringing the love of Christ into the lives of lost and hurting people. We want to see lives transformed, not for our glory, but for the glory of God and for their salvation. That is why we are building a new building. That is why we are planning a new worship service. That is why we want to double attendance in worship. That is why we undertake Upward Basketball and Cheerleading. That is why we have a preschool.

Soon, you are going to hear about some new initiatives, but the bottom line is this. It is about you and me telling others where they can find living water. “Come and see the One who told me everything I have ever done!”