

Give the Gospel of John credit. The storytelling and cast of characters do not sink under the weight of “same old same old”. Last week we met Nicodemus, the consummate insider of the Judaism of his day. A Pharisee. A member of the Sanhedrin. An esteemed public figure. A man.

This week we meet a consummate outsider: a Samaritan. Strike one: Jews despised Samaritans and considered them traitors for centuries-old reasons. Strike two: they were seen as heretics for having their own version of Torah and Temple. Strike three: for this character in particular, she is a woman. What self-respecting woman would dare speak to a man not her family in a public place? And what self-respecting Jewish rabbi would talk to a Samaritan woman in ANY place?!?

There is another detail, actually two, that suggest this woman was an outsider in her own community. She shows up at the well about noon. What kind of person shows up to draw water, and then have to bear its weight home, in the noontime heat? Someone who does not want to be seen? Or hear the whispers behind her back about *that* woman who’s had five husbands and now is shackled up with a sixth man? I mean, come on, even *Samaritans* must have standards.

Jesus is no fool. He knows what time it is. According to John, he knows this person’s marital history. Yet Jesus engages such a one as her openly in a theological discussion that ranges from living water to worship to revealing himself to be Messiah: *I am, the one who is speaking to you*. Jesus does not talk down to her. Jesus does not insist *if only you were . . .* and feel free to fill in the blank for that time or our own that would make her more, well, like *one of us*, on the inside.

No, Jesus meets her where she is, as she is. In that moment, in that encounter: this woman, this outsider, becomes an apostle of Jesus to those hometown folks who may have for a long time kept her on the outside looking in. *Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony: testimony (martureo), as in “witness.”* They came to faith through her.

***For Reflection and Action:***

*Where does this story strike home for one you have known; or for yourself?  
In a bit of an ironic twist: what might this woman and Nicodemus have in common?  
What does the story of the Samaritan woman bring to the life of the church:  
In terms of hospitality; of outreach; of risk?*