

Jesus is Radical

Week 3

by Derek Steinacher

When Emma and I were expecting our second child, we chose to be surprised by the gender. So, we picked a list of names for a boy. We picked a list of names for a girl. But overall, we kind of procrastinated the decision, not knowing which gender it was going to be. It kind of led us to just procrastinate, narrowing down the list of names.

And then we ended up going into the hospital earlier than we expected as well. And so we really weren't ready with a name. And on one of the days we were in the hospital, the night nurse was briefing the morning nurse on kind of everything going on. And the morning nurse said, Oh, this baby, she's so cute. She's so ready to come out into the world.

And so that and then the night nurse overcorrected it. The night nurse was like, Well, they don't know it's a she. So it could be a she or a he. It could be either one. And at that point, we knew we were having a girl. And so we focused our attention on our list. The girl names.

And then we delivered our baby. And the doctor said it's a boy. And we were completely shocked. We're in a series right now called Names. It's a Boy. His name is Jesus. And we're talking about Jesus's journey from the manger to Messiah. We kick this series off on Christmas Eve with a message about Jesus being Lord. Last week, if you were here for the family service, we talked about Jesus as teacher.

Today, we're talking about Jesus is radical. And next week we'll close this series with Jesus is Messiah. Yesterday was Epiphany. Saturday, January 6th is Epiphany, and it celebrates the Magi coming to visit this newborn king of the Jews. One pastor, Rick Millard, says Christmas isn't just a one-day thing. It's supposed to be the 12 days of Christmas.

Christmas is a season that lasts until Epiphany. The feast continues. In a world of rapidly changing trending topics, we move on too fast to the next thing. Then, he said his Heizer has said our society knows how to anticipate an event but not how to sustain it.

So your Christmas decorations are not down. That's okay because we're supposed to celebrate Christmas for 12 days. The Magi coming to visit Jesus reminds us that Jesus is love and knows no boundaries. The Magi were kings and men from the East. They were most likely Persian.

The Magi were not Jewish people as part of their religion. They paid particular attention to the stars, and they gained an international reputation for astrology. And even though their interaction with Jesus is probably a couple of years into his life, it wasn't exactly at the manger, even though it was a couple of years into his life.

They were likely the first contact that Jesus had with people beyond Israel. It was foreshadowing that the Gospel would travel to all nations, to all people. Epiphany celebrates taking the message of Jesus beyond Israel to the world. And although the Magi were unexpected guests, they were not uninvited. God announces the birth of Jesus to all of earth through the stars.

The early church was full of division. Even leaders like Peter and Paul disagreed about who could be included in this new community. Some people in Israel had come to believe that God would only love

people who were like them. And as some of these people started to follow Jesus, they brought pieces of this belief along with them. And sometimes, today, the church still struggles with who is in and who is out.

We're going to read from John for today. If you'd like to follow along. I'm going to paraphrase a lot of the story with the help of Barclay's commentary, but we're going to pick up different verses. The Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making disciples, and so Jesus decided it was time for Him to move to a different region.

He was leaving Judea and he was heading to Galilee. In the time of Jesus, there were three distinct divisions of the territory. You can see it on this map. The orange, the blue, and the yellow in the north was Galilee. In the south was Judea, and in the middle was Samaria. There was a centuries-old feud between the Jewish people and the Samaritans.

The quickest route from Judea there on the bottom to Galilee was through Samaria. It took about three days. There was an alternative route that you could cross over the Jordan in the middle of all those colors: the Jordan River. You could cross over the Jordan River, go up the eastern side of the river to avoid some area, then recross over the Jordan River, north of Samaria, and enter Galilee.

This route took twice as long. Jesus and his disciples sometimes took that way. In fact, they had just taken that alternative route right before this. Going through some areas came with downsides. There was a reason, or really many reasons, that people often didn't go through some areas. There was a long-standing feud, an extreme dislike. There's really no equivalent for us today.

Uh, I was thinking about it. My wife, Emma, and I live here in the great city of Lincoln, Nebraska. Her parents live in Peoria, Illinois. So over the holidays, we've driven out to Peoria several times. And the unfortunate thing about driving to Peoria is you have to drive through the state of Iowa. Four and a half hours of the six-and-a-half-hour drive is through Iowa.

And you see Hawkeye fans in the gas stations and on their cars, right? And they think they're so great because they've won eight out of the last nine games against us. Thank God we won a game last year against them. Right. It's not much of a rivalry, but overall, we are still 30 wins, and they're 21 wins. Maybe you don't know this, but Pastor Mandy and her husband, especially her husband, Tom Bach, is an Iowa Hawkeye fan.

Uh, Tom wore a Nebraska. Sure. He didn't really want to go to Adventureland once, and he got annoyed at how many people were nice and said, Go Big Red to him. Poor Tom. Uh, every week, he has to live with the idea that he might be an illustration in a sermon. And the Mandy's not preaching. And I still use Tom.

Really? This Nebraska-Iowa thing is nothing compared to this Jewish Samaritan quarrel. The Jewish Samaritan quarrel was more than 400 years old, but at the time, Jesus was crossing over some area. It was it was smoldering as resentfully and as bitterly as ever. John said that Jesus had to go through some area, but people really were accustomed to crossing over the Jordan River, taking twice as long, going around Samaria.

The people who lived in some areas of them had been deported years before. Some of them were survivors, a part of the Israelite Judean population that did not go into exile. Those who escaped

continued to live on the western side of the Jordan after the destruction of the northern kingdom and the region. The people who were here, the region took the name of its capital, Samaria, and most importantly, its ethnic, religious, and political development followed a course that diverged that was different than all the other Israelites in the southern kingdom of Judea, as Jesus would have been traveling 35 miles north of Jerusalem.

He was in Samaria. He's 35 miles into his journey. The road ran between Mount Ebel to the north and Mount Gerizim to the south. You probably can't see it, but they're both right in the middle of that blue section. Mountains on both sides. But history made an abysmal chasm of that valley road. The Samaritan ruler, Sand Ballard, built a temple on Mount Gerizim to rival the temple in Jerusalem.

The ruler of Judea would burn that temple and the entire city of Sychar to the ground. We cannot appreciate the nuances of this conversation without first knowing this background. We have to bring this background to the front. Things were tense. They were extremely tense. And on the way through, Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Sekar.

At that point, the road forks into two different directions, and at the fork in the road, one branch goes northeast, sky populous, and the other branch goes west to Nablus and then on to Indiana. Right at that fork in the road stands a well-known Jacob's. Well, it's worth pausing here that this fork in the road kind of resembles this radical love of Jesus that we're talking about today.

On one road, you could say it's the way we've always done it, the way we're used to. But you can't travel that road and the new road at the same time. There was a change, a radical new way that Jesus was about to introduce here. But at this actual fork in the road, Jesus was just tired from the journey.

It shows the reality of his humanity. He was weary. He needed to rest. Jacob's well, where he chose to stop, is not a well of springing water. It's a well in which the water percolates and gathers. It was around 100 feet deep. Clearly, it was so deep that no one could gain water from it without something of which to use to gain water.

So the disciples went ahead of Jesus to a Samaritan town, and something began to happen in them. Because before being with Jesus, it is extremely unlikely that they would have gone to a Samaritan town. But little by little, maybe even unconsciously, barriers were starting to come down. As Jesus sat back at the well by himself, up the well walked a Samaritan woman; why she would have come to this well is somewhat of a mystery.

It was half a mile still from Sychar, where she must have lived, and there would have been water available to her. There might it be that she was so much of a moral outcast that she was driven away from the village in which she had lived to come here to draw water. And what we have here is the briefest possible report of what must have been a long conversation.

It's like the minutes of a committee meeting. We hit the highlights, but this must have been a long conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman must unburden her soul to this stranger for one of the very few times in her life, she found someone with kindness in his eyes instead of critical superiority, and it opened up her heart.

He was one who did not condemn but who understood. John picks up the story. He says this: The Samaritan woman asked, Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink for me? The Samaritan

woman, Jews, and Samaritans didn't associate with each other. Jesus responded, If you recognize God's gift and who is saying to you, Give me some water to drink?

You would be asking him, and he would give you living water. The woman said to him, Sir, you don't have a bucket in this well is deep. Where would you get this living water? Jesus answered. Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.

To a Jewish person, this would have been an amazing story. Here is the Son of God. Tired, thirsty. Here is the holiest of men Listening with understanding to a hard story. Here is Jesus breaking through barriers of nationality, an Orthodox Jewish custom diving right into the heart of the Jewish and Samaritan tensions. Here is the beginning of the Gospel going to all nations.

Here is God loving the world, not in theory, but in action to a Jew. And living water was always better. You think of even bottled water now. Often, it has a mountain and a river on it. First, Jesus asks for a drink. Then, he offers living water. The water on earth is just a signpost, a pointer. At the heart of all of this, there's a fundamental truth that there's a thirst that all of us have that only Jesus can satisfy.

John picks up. The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water. Jesus said to her, Go get your husband and come back here. The woman replied I don't have a husband. You were right to say I don't have a husband, Jesus answered.

You've had five husbands, and the man you're with now is not your husband. You spoken the truth, the woman said, Sir, I see that you are a prophet. There's some discussion here about Jesus talking about actual husbands or about lords of Israel. But at this moment, this Samaritan woman certainly catches sight of herself. What happens when you catch sight of yourself?

Barkley says There are two revelations in Christianity. One is the revelation of God. Second is the revelation of ourselves. We never really see ourselves until we see ourselves in the presence of Christ. Christianity begins with the idea that the life we're living will not do. We awake to ourselves, and we awake to our need for God. Jesus said to her, Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

This is something we could easily breeze over, but this is the tension of this time. Jesus is like, We breathe over this sentence. But Jesus is saying, Believe me, when the time is coming where you're neither going to worship the Father on this mountain, Mount Gerizim, this temple, or on the temple in Jerusalem. Neither of those are going to be.

The woman said, I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called Christ. When he comes, He will teach everything to us. Jesus said to her, I am the one who speaks with you. I am just saying Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that He was talking with the woman. We will close out this series next week, talking about Jesus as the Messiah.

But for today, we underline the idea that the disciples were shocked. This would have been completely new and completely radical at this time. Jesus was breaking down barriers. The disciples walk up to

Jesus, a Jew, a Jewish rabbi sitting with the Samaritan woman. And even though it was forbidden for Rabbi to greet women in public, Jesus greeted her.

A rabbi might not even speak to his own sister or his own daughter in public. For a rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of their reputation. And yet Jesus spoke to the woman. There was a huge feud at this time, at times violent, between the Samaritans and the Jews. But Jesus was breaking down that barrier, too.

There are still barriers that need to be broken down today. Today, many people want nothing to do with Christianity in the church. There's an organization in Lincoln working to help with this. It's actually called Jacob's Well. Well, they wanted to originally be called the well because of this story and how Jesus met people in the community and didn't just try to create a reason for people to come to his church to experience his love.

But the name, the well, was taken. And so Jacob's well, it became, and the thing that the founder, Mark, identified with this story is going into the community and meeting the relational, physical, and spiritual needs of people, which is what their goal is still today. When Jacob's well started, there wasn't nearly as much benevolence work happening in the community, and attraction outreach for churches was huge.

It gave people a reason to spend millions on buildings. It's empty most of the week. Mark said we wanted to take the well to the community and not have the community come to us to access it. So they've served the downtown Lincoln community and the Near South neighborhood since they're actually getting ready to launch into a new project.

Chris and Lenore Berger, who are members here at Horizons, lead to the Broome communities and together to the Broome communities. And Jacob's well. They're partnering on an exciting new big project to continue to serve downtown Lincoln in the near South neighborhood. Jacob's well, his work down the way, his work to bring down the barriers of people who don't find a home in the Interactional Church model, but people who still have a very real spiritual thirst.

Another barrier that most churches seem to put up is with the LGBTQ community. 7.1% of people today identify as LGBTQ+, 20% of Gen Z identify as LGBTQ, plus 86% of LGBTQ-plus people were raised in a faith community, and they're at least two times more likely to leave that faith community. 54% of all LGBTQ-plus people leave their faith.

There's a really well-known pastor in the US who talked about this and who actually offers a ministry at their church to reconcile relationships between parents and their LGBTQ+ children because so often, that fracture in the family hurts relationships so much more. And, of course, being a well-known pastor, he got a ton of criticism on Twitter, and in a smaller group meeting, he shared.

It's like so many people who are criticizing me think that I have an agenda, but it's like they don't even realize that a person can just care. We know that Jesus often got criticism, but we know he cared about everyone. What happens next in the story of the Samaritan woman gets me excited. In fact, he got Jesus excited.

He was Jesus was so excited at this point. He skipped lunch. The disciples offered him food, and he said, I'm good on food. I am living into what I'm doing, what I need to do. Here's where he picks up the story.

John says Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified; he told me everything I've ever done.

So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there for two days. Many more believed because of his word. And they said to the woman, We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is one. This one is truly the savior of the world.

Light changes at the beginning of this story; the woman is alone. We can guess why. But at the end of the story, she can't help but go back to the Samaritan people. She found someone so good that she can't help but tell everyone to come back and come and see. Many people in this Samaritan town believe her because of her words.

And then they experienced Jesus for themselves. And then they believed for themselves. Just because you believe in just because you attend church doesn't mean it still isn't easy to fall into a version of faith that continues to put up barriers. It happens all the time. Jesus took down barriers, but so often, we are the ones who put them back up.

And because of that, some of you feel unworthy to be loved by God. It's easier for you to take a stand for someone else and to say, of course, they should be loved by God than it is for you to admit with everything you know about yourself that you should be loved by God because you know everything about you.

You know the best. You know the worst. You know the things that nobody else knows. And because of that, some of you feel unworthy to be loved by God. And some of you feel like God couldn't have a purpose for your life. You make excuses. You say I don't know enough about the Bible to teach kids or to go on a youth group trip or to lead a life group, or you live with no purpose.

Life is about some temporary selfishness and nothing bigger at all. But imagine yourself. Imagine yourself walking up to a well, you're thirsty, you're tired, you're walking further than you need to to avoid people that are causing your shame to back up to the surface, and you get to the well, and there's a person sitting there as you realize it's Jesus. You feel unworthy to even be with Him. All of your flaws and shortcomings come racing to your head.

And yet he speaks to you. He offers you living water for the disciples. This was a radical idea. It was a fork in the road at Jacob's Well, and maybe this is a fork in the road for you as well. Maybe you thought religion was a list of rules and barriers of who's in and who's out, and you felt like you were on the outside.

But there's a radical new way. Jesus broke those barriers down. Emma's grandpa Christmas. He served as a pastor for a lot of his career, and he passed his phone over to Emma's grandma. And I saw he was sharing a quote with her, and it said, and it said this. I got to catch a look at it. It said churches that set strict rules about who's in and who's out.

I have completely missed the point of Jesus's message. Everybody's in, Nobody's out. Maybe you have felt unworthy, and maybe it's unexpected. But Jesus says the water I give to you will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Jesus engages with you, and He invites everyone. He invites you in.

Let's pray to God. We admit that so often we get our religion mixed up, the barriers you came to tear down. We think we need to reconstruct. But it's reminders like this Samaritan woman. They remind us that we have a place in those times when we feel shame for ourselves, those times when we feel like we couldn't have any worth. But there you are, sitting with us. We thank you for your love. We thank you for your grace because there's no way we can earn that on our own. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.