

“Another Chance, Another Change”

John 4:5-30

March 12, 2023

I would like to tell you a story about a woman named Abby. It was a Sunday morning and Abby decided to visit a church in her community. Abby was a Christian, she had grown up in a Christian family, and she quietly took a seat in the back row of the church. When it was time for Communion, Abby came forward to the altar rail and knelt down with everyone else. However, when the pastor came to her to offer her the body and blood of Jesus in bread and wine, she looked up at him and whispered, “Skip me.” The pastor whispered back, “Why?” And Abby said, “I’m not worthy.” God doesn’t ask any of us to be worthy to receive Holy Communion, so what would prompt Abby to reject this sacrament? Perhaps a closer look at her life would give us a better understanding.

When Abby was in high school she was a straight “A” student and she dated a guy in her class named Nick. After graduation, Abby and Nick were married, thinking life together would be great. However, marriage was a lot harder than they expected and after two years together they divorced. Abby then went to college and soon met James. James was very nice and he was majoring in the same field as Abby. During their senior year they became engaged and soon after graduation they were married. But again, things didn’t work out and a few years later James and Abby were divorced.

Abby was determined not to make the same mistake again, and so when she met Mason, she was careful not to rush into a serious relationship. Two years later, Mason and Abby announced they were getting married, and on their wedding day some of Abby’s family members whispered to each other, “Why is she getting married again?” But Mason seemed like a good guy and her family was supportive. However, a few years later, their problems were pulling them apart and their marriage ended in divorce. Family members then said they hoped Abby would never marry again, after all, “three strikes and you’re out.” Abby felt the same way, but then she met Paul.

Paul was a Christian, he treated Abby with respect, and he understood Abby's apprehension concerning marriage. But after dating for a long time, Paul asked Abby to marry him and this time Abby was convinced that it would be for a lifetime. Sadly, though, it did not work out, and Abby found herself divorced for a 4th time.

Abby decided that if she ever got another chance at marriage, she would do things differently to insure that it would last. Her family, though, told her that they were not going to support her if she got married again. Many of Abby's friends did not want to associate with her any longer and they started talking about her and putting her down behind her back. Abby was very embarrassed and hurt that her family and friends would treat her that way. She didn't think she would ever meet anyone again who would ever want to date her. But then she met Todd. Todd was different from all the other guys, she told her family, and when Abby & Todd became engaged, her family said they would not attend the wedding. Abby & Todd were married at the courthouse without any family or friends. Their first few years together were nice, but whatever it was that led to the collapse of her previous marriages, led to the downfall of this one.

After 5 husbands, Abby decided, "I'm never getting married again." But then Bob shows up. Bob is not interested in getting married, because he doesn't want to be tied down. Abby decides to move in with him, and as a result she becomes the talk of the town. No one wants to associate with her, not even people from her church. What do you think God thinks of Abby?

Our Gospel lesson for today answers that question as we see Jesus and His disciples traveling from Judea to Galilee. This was a long trip, so about noontime Jesus and His disciples stop in Samaria to get some water and supplies for their travels. That doesn't seem unusual until you realize that there was tremendous animosity between Jews and Samaritans in those days.

So in our text we see Jesus is thirsty from His travels. It's the middle of the day, it's hot, and as He rests next to a well, a Samaritan woman comes to draw some water. Now I would like you

to imagine that Abby is the Samaritan woman, and she goes to the well around noontime to get some water knowing that since she is the subject of gossip in the area, no one else will be around at the well at that time of the day since it is so hot, so she won't have to face any ridicule.

As Abby approaches the well, she sees there is a man there; and not just any man, but a Jewish man. Thinking that no Jewish man would ever talk to her in public, she goes to the well and goes about her business as if Jesus wasn't even there. Jesus then does something that would have been considered rather radical – He talks to her in public by asking her for a drink. Abby cannot believe it and somewhat shocked asks, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?”

Jesus then starts talking about “living water” and eternal life, and while Abby is somewhat confused, she doesn't leave. The conversation continues in which she says that she wants some of this “living water” so that she will no longer be thirsty or have to come to the well to draw water and could avoid people. Abby was at a stage in her life where she had basically reduced herself to the status of a prostitute by living with Bob. And yet, God wanted to give Abby another chance. Jesus wanted to reach a woman who nobody else wanted anything to do with.

Have you ever considered that some of the unlovable or unpopular people who come into your life may have been sent to you from God so you could speak to them even though they may not speak to you? Did you ever think that God might be working through you so that they can have another chance to experience His love and forgiveness?

Jesus then tells her to get her husband; and with those words, Jesus effectively shows Abby her sin and gives her an opportunity to confess. She admits that she doesn't have a husband, and when Jesus tells her all about her background – He knows that she has been married 5 times and is currently living with a man, who is not her husband – she is clearly amazed. So knowing she cannot lie to Jesus, she tries to change the subject from her sin to something that would interest Jesus. Perceiving that Jesus is

a prophet, she changes the topic to worship and asks in verse 20, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Who’s right?”

Jesus’ response is that you can worship God anywhere, the place or the city doesn’t matter. Abby is somewhat surprised by Jesus’ answer, so she expresses her faith in God by saying, “I know the Messiah is coming and when he comes, he will tell us all things.” Jesus responds to her by doing something rather remarkable. He says, “I who speak to you am he.” For the first time Jesus reveals His true identity to someone. He doesn’t reveal himself to the religious leaders of the day or announce who He is in a sermon to thousands of people in the temple, instead He chooses an outcast Samaritan woman to reveal that He is the Christ, the Messiah. But why did Jesus choose her? I think He picked her to let us know that none of us are beneath His love and that He is the God of many second chances.

This woman was so excited, having seen the Messiah and perhaps receiving a renewed sense of self-worth, that she abruptly left her water jar and ran back to tell the people in her village, people who had mocked her and rejected her, what she experienced. She came to the well as one disgraced, but she left as one graced by the presence of God. Near the end of John 4 it says that many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus, because of her testimony. The world looked at this woman and saw a prostitute, but Jesus looked at her and saw a great evangelist.

When Abby told the pastor that she did not feel worthy to receive Communion, the pastor whispered back, “Neither do I, but this is God’s gift for you.” Upon hearing those words, she took Christ’s body and blood for the complete forgiveness of all her sins. Abby learned that she had been given another chance and she left the church a changed person. Just imagine how we will change when we understand that Jesus sees great value in each one of us, and if you want to live the life that God has called you to live, then share God’s love with others, and forgive as God has forgiven you.