

# Brenda Seat: One Small Step

Seekers Church

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Brenda Seat

## One Small Step

Good morning,

During this time of Lent, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Over the course of seven Sundays, we will walk with him through the last days of his ministry, his journey into Jerusalem, his arrest and suffering on the cross and the mystery of his resurrection.

Lent, is a time to look inside ourselves, a time of self-examination, a time to give things up, or to take something new on, so that in some small way we take on some of the suffering of Jesus into ourselves. It is a yearly, recurring reality check...a time to look into the mirror. It is a time to take inventory. It is a chance to make sure that we are really living fully into the promise of New Life that Jesus' example offers us. The lectionary readings are our guide into this time of self-reflection...holding up a mirror to our lives, confronting us with the places where we have grown too complacent, reminding us again of the bedrock of our faith. Each week we are confronted again with living out our faith, being faithful to what Christ is calling us.

In last week's reading Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a Jew. He was a man who was educated and confident that he was on the right path to knowing God. This week, in sharp contrast, our reading has Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman, a woman whose morals were suspect and caused her to be alienated in her village, who was probably

uneducated, and belonged to a group of people who were ignored and despised. For people of Jesus' time and for the early Church, who heard this story, just saying the word Samaritan, produced a strong reaction.

We have lost that sense, I think, and yet without it we lose part of the story. Being alienated, ignored and rejected permeates this story. We need to get in touch with what that means to us, in order to reclaim the power in this story. We cannot fully understand the reaction of the Samaritan woman until we know how she felt as she approached the well that day.

Maybe this story can help us understand. My sister has a friend that she has known for many years in Japan. Sharon has stayed in her home in Nagano many times over the years and has become friends with her family, too. Mrs. Morita goes to church regularly, travels extensively, in Asia, especially Mongolia, which she has visited almost 15 times. She is quite interested in other cultures and people and considers herself very open minded. In a very unusual decision, she decided to expand her daughter's horizons and sent her to the U.S. for high school and college. While her daughter was in the U.S., she fell in love with and married a Korean. They soon had two little girls and after finishing school, they returned to Japan to live. As the two little girls grew, it soon became apparent that they were very different in their personalities and in their looks. As time went on, and at various times when Sharon visited, both Mrs. Morita and her daughter would say that the older girl, who they believed did not look as nice or did not act in the way that they wanted her to act, had taken after the Korean side of the family. They also would say that the younger daughter, who they thought looked nicer and acted just the way they wanted her to act, took after the Japanese side of the family. Although Sharon never could see how one child was more Korean and one more Japanese, she noticed that both Mrs. Morita and her daughter were playing favorites

between the girls in many small little ways – like never taking pictures of the older girl by herself, even on special occasions. They rejected her, ignored her, and treated her as though she was “not good enough” in many small ways. Eventually, Mrs. Morita’s daughter got divorced and as part of the divorce the older girl, the one that they said looked more Korean, went with her father back to Korea, and the younger girl who they said looked more Japanese stayed with her mother in Japan. This was a final rejection. Mrs. Morita told Sharon that it was all for the best.

This story breaks my heart.

Did the woman at the well feel ignored; did she feel that kind of deep soul warping rejection? I think so...I think that maybe she had felt that many times in many different ways in her life...

When she meets Jesus that day she is astounded to be treated as **someone**. She must have been amazed to not be rejected or ignored, as she had learned to expect in her many encounters with people. Jesus talked with her! Moreover, he treated her as someone who is known and loved by God.

I am slowly becoming aware of the power that is in what Jesus did. When we begin to interact with people in a real way there is something transforming in that experience. In the Covenant Discipline group that I am part of, one of our disciplines is, “I will walk cheerfully over the earth, answering to that of God in each one I encounter.” It has been an interesting and challenging experience to begin to try to incorporate that into my life in a concrete way, and I think it has been for the other members in the group, too. Each week as we share around our efforts to maintain this discipline, one or more of us will share a story. We are all beginning to notice, more and more, the people that cross our path every day. We realize that in those small moments we in little ways can let people know that we have noticed them as individuals, not as just the

grocery clerk, the parking lot attendant or the waiter in the restaurant, not as a cog in a wheel, but as a real and whole person. This discipline is breaking open the cocoon that I live in, and to begin to engage me in a deeper way with the people around me. It is grounding me in ways that I am not sure that I can explain. Moreover, the response to these little efforts is quite amazing. Each week as we tell our stories to each other, we hear of those moments where we have reached across the boundaries that we create when we see only the grocery clerk, the parking lot attendant, the person next to us on the train, or even the Samaritan woman, and, instead, truly see that person as someone, like us, who is known and loved by God. Moreover, I myself have experienced the power of this small thing, when those who I encounter see me as a whole person, and do not treat me as a problem to be solved, or as an annoyance to be ignored. There is that sense of deep connection when they let me know, that in that moment, they see me as a person of worth and value. That experience motivates me to reach out even more to those who may feel, that they are ignored or rejected, for whatever reason, and to let them know, that in that moment, they are someone who is known and loved by God. It is just one small step...

As he continues his conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus tells her that he can give her living water, water that when you drink it will never make you thirsty again, water like an eternal spring, and she says "Great! Give me some of that kind of water so that, I don't have to keep on coming to this well all the time!" She was being very practical and literal. She wanted something that would end one of her greatest miseries, getting water from the well, and avoiding the other women in the town who rejected her. Nevertheless, as we all know, Jesus was not talking about literal water ...he was talking about water that would help heal the hurt in her soul... I wonder if for the early Church this was not one of those places where, when it was read aloud, everyone chuckled to himself or herself. It was a kind of inside joke. I am sure

that everyone in the early church, and even now as we read it this Sunday again, smirked, because we all know now what she did not know. However, we all know this now, because we have all been in that literal place where the Samaritan woman was: locked into believing that the only thing real in our lives was what we could see and touch. Not really seeing the spiritual dimension of our lives, or ignoring it as if it did not exist. This whole exchange between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is both humorous and painful, because it reminds us of ourselves.

This last weekend on the youth retreat, we watched the movie, "The Matrix." The movie is set in the future where Artificial Intelligence has taken over the world and has found a way to use humans as source of energy, to keep them operating. In order to maximize the production of energy they create the matrix, a dream world where humans think they live and exist but which in fact is a computer generated illusion. The story revolves around a Christ-like character named Neo who they considered "The One" who will save humanity and destroy the matrix. One of the more famous lines in the movie is a question that Neo is asked by his guide, Morpheus, as he gets ready to encounter the truth of the Matrix. "Have you ever had a dream that you were so sure was real? What would happen if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the real world and the dream world?"

The conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman begins to give us an answer to the question posed to Neo. Jesus is challenging her to think beyond what she thinks is real about her life, and to think about what is truly real, what is truly life and soul satisfying, what is really living water for her and her life.

What is living water for you? How would you know the difference between the real world and the dream world? These are challenging questions with no easy answers.

It is hard to get way from the messages that tell us how to satisfy the hunger within ourselves. The media tells us that if we buy that car, that computer or that lipstick or if we go to that restaurant, look like that fashion model and go to that beach on our vacation, we will be happy and satisfied. However, it is an illusion, just like the matrix.

We are given messages all the time that our worth is determined by how much money we make, how much power we have, by how good we do in school, by which college we go to, by how thin, or by how pretty we are. We are told it is how we look to others rather than who we really are that matters. We are stuck in this matrix, this illusion, this trap, that keeps us from finding what is truly life giving.

In the last few years, I have begun to see some of the matrix in my life. I see illusions that I live with that I think are real. The places where I get stuck in what seems like the real world but are not life giving and just make me thirsty for more. The first things that I began to notice were the places in my life that are like junk food, things that taste good for a little bit, but make you feel sick if you eat too much of them. Things like stupid novels, or watching mindless TV, going shopping just for the fun of it when I didn't really need to, or even looking through the catalogues that come in the mail, over and over again.... All of these things were ways to feed my soul, but they were unsatisfying...and I didn't even know it until I began to add some balance to my diet, adding things that were soul satisfying, like exercising, reading various books that stimulated my thinking about God, and becoming more intentional about my spiritual practices. These additions helped me begin to be more attentive to the spiritual hunger that I sensed inside of me. I still eat some junk food....it's hard not to, but by adding some "growing food," I feel like I am getting strong enough to let go of the other, and it's strange, but powerful hold over me.

I am only just beginning this journey, and my family will tell

you that if I have taken any step at all, it is only a very small step, but it is a step, a step towards living water.

As Jesus and the Samaritan woman continue their conversation, she begins to glimpse that she is encountering someone who is transforming. She hurries to tell the rest of the village, the very village that had ignored and rejected her and they too came to listen. As Jesus talked with them, they urged him to stay with them and he stayed for two days. He was with this woman and the villagers as they began to take their first steps in their journey of faith. The story ends with the villagers telling the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." They were transformed.

I brought this today as a symbol of being with each other. It is a plaster cast of Marian and Lauren holding hands. It was done quite some time ago, when they still would hold hands on their way to the bus stop, or in the forests of Yellowstone Park. It is hard, now, to tell which hand is whose, until you look on the bottom and see on which side the names are. It is a powerful image to me that we have each other on our spiritual journey, and that sometimes it is hard to tell who is with whom on the journey.

Being with each other as we follow Christ is a powerful act of servanthood that we give to each other as part of our commitment to being a small part of the body of Christ. We recognize that when we share communion together. We share each other's struggles; we worry about each other; we support each other as we are called to service in the larger world; we hold each other when our faith is thin or when we have lost our way. We encourage each other, and sometimes we are quite blunt with each other. At some point we are each able to look at those who have walked with us and say, "I no longer believe in Christ because of what you have told me, I now believe because of what I have experienced of Christ myself." This is

transformation.

I preach this morning as one who has still many steps to go in following Christ. I am painfully aware of my limited commitment. Where I feel I am called right now, does not place me in working directly with the homeless, or the poor and I have not sacrificed greatly, and yet there is within me a hunger and desire to follow Christ in the everydayness of how I live my life. These steps that I have enumerated are just some small steps, embarrassingly small, really, but if each of us took these small steps, faithfully: treating the people that we encounter in our everyday lives as if they were known and loved by God, recognizing and enhancing that which is truly life giving within us, and committed to being servants to each other, willing to be with people as they began their own journey of faith in Christ, then I believe that transformation does and would occur over and over again. Maybe, just maybe, that transformation would reach around the world to that little girl in Korea, whose story I told, and someone would reach out to her and let her know that she too, is known and loved by God.

The journey of transformation that Christ calls us to begins with one small step....

Amen.