

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**Beyond Beliefs pt. 5: Body Knowing**  
**John 4:5-15**  
**February 4, 2018**

*[Props: large clear water vase and dry fountain. Pour water into fountain a few times before I begin speaking]*

There's something beautiful about water, isn't there? Something elemental.

*[3<sup>rd</sup> cup]*

Something that connects deeply to us...

After all, **our bodies are about 60%** just water. More than half of your body is made up purely of water.

*[4<sup>th</sup> cup]*

The **air we breathe** is full of it. In fact there's enough water in the air to cover the entire surface of the earth... land and ocean in an inch of rain...

*[5<sup>th</sup> cup]*

Even with all that water in the air... about **70% of the earth's surface** is covered with water... oceans stretching across from one continent to another.... wave after wave, churning.

And even across the land... Ozark waterways... the mighty Mississippi...  
to waterfalls over mountains cliffs, eroding rocks,  
cutting the Grand Canyon...

*[6<sup>th</sup> cup]*

Water is everywhere...

And it draws us... because our ***bodies*** are so intimately tied to it.

You can survive three weeks without eating food,  
but only a matter of days without water.  
And our bodies won't let us forget, will they?

Go a day without drinking anything and your body starts to speak to you.

It speaks to you with cracked lips, and headaches...

Go another day and your heart rate starts increasing to push that thickened blood through your veins...

Your body speaks to you. It's trying to tell you things.

There is an innate basic awareness that your body has... a wisdom held in the body that even your mind doesn't always recognize.

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And that's true of more than water.

Our bodies are one of the centers of knowing,  
of wisdom, of awareness. They are often talking to us.  
We just aren't listening.

Belden Lane writes, “The body is an extremely reliable guide.... What the mind hardly fathoms, the body already knows.”<sup>1</sup>

The ancients knew this. And now modern neuroscience is finding the same thing.  
Sometimes our bodies know and respond to situations  
or to factors in our environment,  
or to realities around us that our conscious thoughts don’t recognize...

It’s rooted in the way our brains process things. Our bodies can respond to our environment before our minds even have a chance to process the information into thoughts.  
Isn’t that amazing?  
The body is an extremely reliable guide.

The ancients were in touch with that pattern. They understood it. They taught that our bodies hold wisdom, and awareness, and insights...

But in our **thought-centric rationalism**, we have a tendency to ignore the ways our body speaks to us, and the wisdom held in our bodies. In fact, most of us have never been taught **how** to listen to the wisdom held in our body.

So instead we ignore our bodies,  
or use our bodies, or even abuse our bodies...  
without any awareness of the consequences of what we are doing... as if your body is just some kind of impersonal machine disconnected from who you are.

But saints throughout history have said that your body is deeply intertwined with who you are. It’s intertwined with your soul. And your body has ways of knowing and perceiving that we need to learn to pay attention to.

Paul is assuming this when he writes “the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, honor God with your body.” It is a place where you can connect with the divine...because your body is a temple.

Think about that for a moment. ***Your body is a place where you can connect with the divine: That’s what the temple was.***

***Your body can be aware of God in ways that your mind cannot.*** Let me just repeat that b/c it’s so foreign to us. ***Your body can be aware of God in ways that your mind cannot.***

Which means  
on the one hand, God communes with your soul  
through your body even when you are unaware of it.  
But also, our bodies are one of the ways that we encounter and come to know the mysterious presence of God.

God comes to us through the five senses, through body knowing.

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<sup>1</sup> Belden C. Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

After Paul, we hear this same pattern in the spiritual giants of our faith, like the desert mothers and fathers,  
and in the Celtic traditions,  
and the Franciscan traditions... all those creation, incarnation – centered Christian traditions.

They understood that God speaks to us through our bodies.  
Your body contains wisdom and surprising ways of knowing.  
And that's why Jesus often comes and meets us through our bodies.

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Which bring us to this beautiful story in John 4... this story, about encountering Jesus that is so very different from last week's encounter in John 3.

Remember last week? Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, an educated male, a Jewish religious leader, with a name, at night. And in that conversation Jesus met him with wisdom sayings... with words and ideas.

It could not be more different than this moment in John 4.  
Here, in the very next story Jesus is meets  
a Samaritan,  
a non-Jewish outsider,  
a woman with no name,  
a questionable past, without honor,  
under the noon-day sun,  
in the desert heat, next to a well, [*move to the fountain*]  
talking... [*turn on fountain*] about water.

It's very physical, very elemental....  
Jesus is thirsty and needs a drink.  
She is thirsty and needs a drink.  
Jesus meets her...body to body... soul to soul.

In fact, that's what I love about the ancient icon on the front of your worship guide. It's from the Antioch in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and when you look at the icon, you don't know who is offering water to who, do you?

Both Jesus and the woman are holding the water... somehow both are offering and both are receiving... Jesus and the woman are meeting... body to body, thirst to thirst.

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But to see the depths of that, there are some important things we need to recognize about this un-named Samaritan women at the well... and some of that comes from the part of the story we didn't read this morning.

Right where we left off, Jesus names... the story of her **body**.  
You see, this woman has had five husbands and the man she is now with is not her husband.  
Now, its important to understand the social context here so that we know what this means.  
This woman is most likely **not** some scandalous woman jumping from husband to husband... some **sinner** that Jesus is reaching out to.

The most likely reason for all those marriages is that she's been dismissed by her husbands... divorced...over and over again. Remember, in their culture women couldn't divorce their husbands.

Only men could divorce their wives...

And the main reason a man divorced his wife in that time had everything to do with her body. The main reason for divorce was barrenness.

So here this woman is... divorced, rejected, discarded by husband... after husband... after husband... after husband...

They took her in marriage... but when her body didn't give them what they wanted anymore... they decided they were done with her, and moved on.

Now scholars suggest that most likely... her fifth husband died... and she's been widowed... and according to the customs and laws of the day, she's been given to her dead husband's brother... That's what Jesus means when he says, "and now the man you are with is not your husband."

She's been given, like a piece of property, to her dead husband's brother. One more time... she's being passed around... from one man to the next...

In other words, the woman at the well, is most likely not a ***serial sinner***.

She's a ***serial victim***... a victim of a male dominated culture that only cared about what it could or couldn't get from her body.

Which is to say then, that the woman at the well isn't the shady character that our judgmental imaginations have so often made her out to be (including my own, I would add).

But after studying this a bit deeper, I would suggest *she is the patron saint of the #MeToo movement*.

Here she is:

1. She's another nameless woman in a long line of women who has had to navigate the power dynamics of men who want to use her body.
2. She's another nameless woman in a long line of women who have been told that ***they*** are the source of the problem and then been discarded.
3. She's another nameless woman in a long line of women who knows that if she tried to defend herself, or speak her truth, she would be shamed and publically humiliated.
4. She's another nameless woman in a long line of women that has been held up as an example of moral degradation... moral corruption, in order to deflect the moral failure of the men in her community...  
the men that either used her... body...  
or the men that turned a blind eye to what was happening.  
Either way... she has been the scapegoat of the moral failure of the men in her community.

Conclusion: It's a common story, isn't it?

Blaming a woman to avoid the responsibility of a man's actions? Well, that's as commonplace as Missouri's politics and as ancient as the story... of Adam and Eve.

So yes, I'd say this woman at the well [who becomes, by the way, the first great evangelist in the Gospel of John (it's another part of the story we didn't read)], she may just be the patron saint of the #MeToo movement.

Her body has been used and reused, again and again. And even if she tries not to think about it, her body remembers. That's how the body works. It does for us all.

Our bodies don't erase our wounds, they scar over them.  
They heal, but they don't forget.  
The body carries your story... your life.  
Even when your mind tries to forget, your body remembers.

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And this woman's body, after being used so many times... well, it's pretty dried up. There is a deep thirst in her.

Her lips are cracked.

Her heart pounds heavy.

She thirsts in body and soul. They are one and the same... because the body and soul are so intertwined. The body's history... the body's story... shapes the soul.

And she's thirsty.

So when Jesus starts talking about the water he has... a living water that never runs dry... that bubbles up like a fountain that never ends... she can't resist. "Give me this water," she says, "so that I may never be thirsty again..."

She's thirsty... and Jesus comes to her in something as basic and simple as H<sub>2</sub>O. He does this because water is always so much more than just three simple molecules, isn't it?

Water is life, and refreshment...

Water has the power to reshape the landscape.

Water carries the song of creation

Water cleanses our deepest wounds

Water drips from the sky, softening the hard-cracked ground.

And it speaks to our bodies.

And God comes to us in all of it.

In its fierce power and gentle showers... Christ is there... saying,

***"The water I give can quench your thirsty body  
and remake the landscape of your soul."***

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Well, this woman isn't sure what to do with Jesus... She puts up a few defenses. Not surprising after the way she's been used by men. But her thirst keeps drawing her in. As the conversation goes on she asks all kinds of questions...

questions about where they are to worship,

and about who the Messiah is... and when Jesus claims he is the Messiah... she becomes silent. Their conversation ends.

About then the disciples come back and she leaves... and she goes back to her village and begins to tell folks what happened. "I met this man who told me everything I have ever done! Come and see."

[These are the same words by the way, that Philip said to Nathaniel back in John 1, when Nathaniel was sitting under his tree of skepticism. Remember that from last month? "Come and see," Philip said to Nathaniel.]

Well, now the woman at the well has gone back to her community with the same invitation, but still quite unsure what to make of all of it. "Come and see," she says, "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

And that question... is the last we hear of her,  
even as all her village comes and ends up inviting Jesus to stay with them,  
and they affirm her intuition...

and they claim at the end of the story that surely Jesus is more than the Messiah. **"Jesus is the Savior of the World,"** they say. That's why she's considered the first great evangelist in John.

But the last words from her mouth take us right to the heart of this series we're in that we've called, "Beyond Beliefs."

The woman at the well... she doesn't know what to believe **about** Jesus... all she knows is what she **experienced through** Jesus. She's encountered something profound, something physical, something that began quenching a deep thirst in her.

The woman at the well meets Jesus body to body, soul to soul.  
And something in her gut makes her ask: "He can't be the Messiah... can he?"

And her question is left hanging in the air for us to wrestle with.

It's a question that reminds us even if we don't have all the answers, and we can't explain it all, we can still name our own experience with Jesus.

And here's what we've seen so far this month through the Gospel of John; this month, as we've encountered Jesus again and again:

Jesus is the one who **sees us**. Like Nathaniel... under the tree... wrestling with our questions and doubts, stuck in our logical mind, Jesus sees and knows... and invites us to see a reality beyond the concrete.

Jesus is the one who meets our deep emptiness like he did at the wedding at Cana. He meets our deep emptiness with the celebration and joy of new wine that is even better than before.

Jesus is the one who meets us with grace and **truth** and turns over tables of our injustice.

Jesus is the one who embodies wisdom, and frustrates our thinking, and challenges us to be born with the eyes of the Spirit.

And Jesus is the one... who comes to us through our five senses... speaking not just to our minds, but to our bodies... and our body's story and scars.

"Come and see," says the woman. "He can't be the Messiah, can he?"

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Her question and her invitation is for you this morning.  
So if you're curious or if you're thirsty,  
or if you need to know his presence with you again today: Come and see.

**Come to what is offered at this table,  
And meet Jesus, *body to body*.**

Taste and see and you may just find that, "The body is an extremely reliable guide... What the mind hardly fathoms, the body already knows."<sup>2</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Belden C. Lane, *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.