

Once upon a time, in one of my former parishes, which will remain anonymous to protect the innocent. . . There was a couple that I just did not see eye to eye with.

Politically we were at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Theologically we were totally different.

Socially, we would never move in the same circles.

As far as I knew we had no common interests whatsoever.

But, lo and behold, one day an invitation for dinner was extended – and I thought – why not. I had no idea how we were going to keep a conversation alive throughout the evening. And thought that I would be miserable and be kicking myself all night for being so crazy as to accept this invitation --- but I was willing to try.

And at the end of that evening we spent together – I was actually surprised that I had somewhat of a pleasant time.

Oh, I knew better than to think we would ever be close friends --- or that I would ever want to repeat the experience --- but we at least got to know each other better –

I would like to think we understood each other a little more – and each of us could have a little less animosity – and a little more respect for each other.

Even though I still new Jesus command of loving even your enemies was a tough nut to crack --- I at least knew for sure it is possible to dislike your enemies a little less, without too much difficulty.

And this came about all because of a conversation – an interaction – an engagement.

Jesus had all the reasons in the world not to converse with this woman at the well --- and she had just as many reasons not to talk to him either.

Morally, they were certainly at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Socially, well, in their patriarchal society – a man would never speak to a woman – especially when they were alone in a public place.

They were certainly pushing the boundaries.

Religiously, he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan – and there was mutual animosity between these two groups – partly because many generations earlier, upon their release from the Babylonian captivity – the Jews rebuilt the holy Temple in Jerusalem without inviting the Samaritans to help, and so the Samaritans did not feel welcome there and worshipped elsewhere.

So a woman who comes to perform an ordinary task on an ordinary day – soon finds herself in an extraordinary conversation – one that would change her life.

For Jesus wants something more than water. He wants the woman's faith. He probes and questions, demonstrating his prophetic knowledge of her life and his willingness to satisfy the deepest thirst in her heart.

Jesus offers her living water. He is that water, the one who can so slake those who receive him, so that they will never be thirsty, lifeless, or aimless again. Jesus wants her to drink him in.

And she does--- and soon acts like a disciple – inviting others to believe in Jesus.

An ordinary task, on an ordinary day – leads to an extraordinary conversation which changed two people's lives --- all because both were willing to let their guard down – and have a conversation – an interaction – and engagement.

And that is my word for the week: engagement – the act of entering into conversation with another.

And this is the picture.

Who do you most need to have a conversation with this Lent?

Who are you at opposite ends of the political / religious / social / economic spectrum with, who you continue to judge or avoid --- that if you just let your guard down and had a conversation / an interaction / an engagement with ----- you might come to understand each other a little more – and each of you could have a little less animosity – and a little more respect for each other?

This person could be someone in your family, someone you work with, someone in the neighborhood, someone you meet on the street or in the grocery store --- maybe even someone at Church.

Who do you most need to have a conversation with this Lent?

Then make the call. Have the conversation. Engage one another in dialogue – and make the world just a little more pleasant place.