

PRAY Jesus, you crossed boundaries to reach out to people many saw as enemies. Help us accept each other with our differences. Help us reach out to others in your spirit and recognize that all have dignity. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Lent



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SPIRIT

By Bob Bartlett

I taught sexuality at a high school where some teachers posted students' grades in their classrooms. I asked my students in sexuality class whether they minded if I posted their grades.

"Sure, post my grade," one student commented. "I ask a woman in my class out and she says, 'Weren't you the one who got the D in sexuality?' I'll explain, 'Ah, yeah, but that was only because I didn't hand in some assignments.'"

Peer pressure rarely lets up around sexuality. When NFL quarterback Tim Tebow announced in college that virginity was among his Christian values, most church leaders, talk show hosts, and sports commentators praised his character and the example he set for young men. But, some made him the butt of jokes.

Pressure comes not only from outside—the judgments of family, friends, church, but also from within—the feeling no one else in the universe shares my beliefs and values. For males and females, proclaiming one's virginity can feel uncomfortable. Will others see me as a prude or as someone not afraid to live my values? Will peers ridicule me as inexperienced and naïve or praise me for my integrity? Will people laugh at me? How much do I care what others think?

What about the other side? What if I am not a virgin? Do I feel comfortable telling people this? Will my friends, classmates, or youth group judge me? "Oh, him! He has had sex with half the school." "Oh, her! Steer clear." Will I tell my parents?

My next girl- or boyfriend? The man or woman I marry? What does God think of me?

When peer pressure makes us wonder about a relationship, four questions are worth thinking about.

Is the relationship fun?

Is the relationship exclusive?

Are we comfortable with silence?

Am I dating an equal?

Dating is supposed to be fun.

Not hilarious every moment, but two people ought to enjoy each other, talk seriously sometimes, but have fun together, and not pressure each other. In a healthy relationship one can say no and the other respects the choice.

Most of us have observed couples who fight constantly. Each puts the other down behind his or her back. Friends wonder why they continue to go out. Their relationship exists like a bad habit, or they are hanging on to each other until someone else comes along.

Relationships should not be exclusive. When I observe couples cutting off family and friends, when they stop doing things they used to love doing, I get nervous that the relationship is becoming unhealthy. It can appear very romantic when he announces he is not trying out for the basketball team senior year, so he can spend more time with her. Often this is more foolish than romantic.

GROWING TOWARD INTIMACY



Exclusivity is often a danger sign that sex is becoming a preoccupation in the relationship. This can trap a couple and isolate them from friends and activities they enjoy.

A person who really loves me does not ask me to give up friends. No one person, no matter how great she or he is, can take care of all my needs. Authentic love includes, invites, is open to life and people. It does not desire to exclude or cut off the other people with whom we share life.

Once during a talk on healthy relationships a junior from Chicago asked to comment.

"I don't go on dates any more without talking first," he said. "I tell the girl what my limits are physically and why. I lay out my boundaries. If



she can't respect those, then the date is over. If we start pushing beyond the boundaries, we call a time-out and have a good talk. The reason is that I loved this one girl more than any other. I got her pregnant and her parents never let me see her again. It still hurts, and I will not let that happen again."

Out of the 100 kids at the talk at least 20 more talked about setting boundaries. This is a sign of healthy intimacy.

Comfort with silence. Some young people today text so exclusively they have trouble talking face to face, one to one, about anything that matters. Silence can be a sign that a couple can't talk and the relationship is in jeopardy, but usually being silent

together comes from a high level of comfort and trust. Couples who are intimate in healthy ways can sometimes silently study together or sit closely for 15 minutes or more and feel very comfortable.

Fun, openness to others, and comfort with silence all indicate health in close, developing friendships. Basically, healthy patterns of intimacy show in the ability to be a friend.

Those young people who have several healthy, intimate friendships but never seem to date should hang in there. I had an annual date in high school. I was probably the Confirmation service project for some of them. At times this can be funny; it can also be painful.

However, compromising one's self to get dates is not worth it. Some



WHO *do I want* TO BE?

By Ellie Roscher

Every day voices tell us who to be. We internalize some messages and dismiss others. Each of us has a life and identity of our own and a say in our becoming.

Labels—goof off, jock, nerd—can become self-fulfilling prophecies. We become who we think we are.

I was painfully shy in kindergarten. When I was in high school, my mom told me how she had driven past the kindergarten, seen me alone on the playground, and started to cry. She wanted to stop and help me find friends because she had been shy, too. She explained that in high school other students didn't see her as a smart

and accomplished but shy person. They saw her as stuck up when she was really just scared.

I decided to stop being shy. To change was scary but I wanted to be in charge of who I was becoming and let others adjust their ideas of who I was in the process.

In choosing friends and companions, it is important to surround ourselves with people who help us be our most authentic selves. Such friends see us at our worst and can help us remember who God created us to be. They will celebrate and encourage all that is best in who we are.

What words do your parents use to describe you? Do they know the most authentic you, or do you wear a mask at home?

How do teachers and coaches describe you? What version of you do you let them see?

Who do your friends say that you are? How do you like who you are with your friends?

What messages do you receive from the media, classmates, or teammates about who you should be? How does God see you?

Who do you say that you are? What words describe you? When, where, and with whom are you most yourself? Complete five statements that begin, "I am..."

women hide their intelligence, their assertiveness, their humor so that they won't intimidate the guy. Some men will act like someone else, trying to be tough, funny, or intelligent, thinking the women will like them more. No date is worth the price of not being one's self. Good friendships with males/females are more life-giving than these kind of dates.

Dating an equal. Choosing to date someone who will be dependent and safe happens with more frequency than we think. I hear teens talk about women and men they go out with who are "so stupid" or "will never get it." Some guys will brag about the "bimbos" they date, and some girls about these "clueless" guys they go out with.

When I hear these remarks, I tend to think less of them than the people they are ridiculing. I want to challenge them, and sometimes do, by questioning them about what they are avoiding. I want them to reflect on why they choose to date people they can control. Are they afraid someone might get in? Are they fearful of the vulnerability that real intimacy requires?

Real intimacy is not easy. It requires ongoing energy and effort. Avoiding intimacy is an easy pattern to develop early in life and one we can transfer into our adult relationships.

QUESTIONS 1 How many close friendships can one person have? 2 What do you think makes a relationship healthy? 3 What makes conversations matter between friends? 4 To what voices do you listen? 5 How does the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman change their relationship? 6 What is the spring of water within us?

SUNDAY GOSPEL

3rd Sunday of Lent

Samaritans believe a woman's word.

NARRATOR: On his way through Samaria Jesus came to the town called Sychar near the land Jacob gave his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw some water.

JESUS: Give me a drink.

NARRATOR: His disciples had gone into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman replied—

WOMAN: You are a Jew. How can you ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?

JESUS: If only you could see God's gift and who it is asking you for a drink, you would ask him and he would give you living water.

WOMAN: Sir, you don't have a bucket and this well is deep. Where do you expect to get living water? Are you greater than our ancestors Jacob and Rachel, who gave us this well and whose family and flocks all drank from it?

JESUS: Everyone who drinks this water will keep getting thirsty, but those who drink the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

WOMAN: Sir, give me this water! Then I will never be thirsty, and I won't have to keep coming here to draw water.

JESUS: Go, call your husband, and come back.

WOMAN: I have no husband.

JESUS: You are right to say, "I have no husband." You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.

WOMAN: Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say



Illustration by Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ

Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship God.

JESUS: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know, while we Jews know. Salvation is from the Jews. An hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth. For God seeks such worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth.

WOMAN: I know the Messiah is coming, who will proclaim all things to us.

JESUS: I am he, who is speaking to you.

NARRATOR: Just then Jesus' disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. The woman left her water jar and went back to the city to tell the people about Jesus.

WOMAN: Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did. Can he be the messiah?

NARRATOR: The people left the city and set out to meet Jesus. Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." When the Samaritans came to Jesus, they begged him to stay, so he stayed there two days. Many more believed in Jesus because of his word. They spoke to the woman.

SAMARITAN 1: Now it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves.

SAMARITAN 2: We know Jesus is the Savior of the world.

John 4.5-30,39-42.

Breaking boundaries

Jesus doesn't see the invisible social boundaries people put between themselves and others. Jesus would be the kind of jock who talks to nerds, the kind of smart kid who doesn't think those who struggle with school are beneath him. Jesus was a dark-skinned, swarthy kind of guy who didn't make much of skin color or where people worshiped.

Visible and invisible boundaries divide people in our world as they did in Jesus' world. New immigrants stream into our cities; many wear different clothing. Israelis and Palestinians find making peace very difficult. Ethnic cleansing, racial profiling, gang banging enforce boundaries to separate them from us.

Jews and Samaritans shared a common history. They descended from the same ancient settlers of their land—Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. All 12 tribes of descendants worshiped on Mt. Gerizim near Samaria together. All kept the law of Moses.

After David united the tribes into one kingdom and his son Solomon built a temple, the kingdom split in two. The split deepened into religious alienation when Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom, deported many of its people, and settled the land with foreigners who worshiped other gods (721 B.C.).

The priest Ezra refused to let the Samaritans help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem after the exile (400 B.C.). The Samaritans sided with the Greeks during the Maccabean revolt for independence (170 B.C.). By Jesus' time Jews and Samaritans didn't mix.

The Samaritan woman, who has one of the longest conversations any woman has with Jesus in the gospels, knows the religious history of her people. She recognizes Jesus is a prophet, not because he reads her mind, but because Israel's prophets see their relationship with God as like

a marriage. When Jesus says, "You have had five husbands," he is saying Samaritans have worshiped five foreign gods after intermarrying with the five Gentile tribes who resettled their region.

Jesus is speaking to the woman of Samaria as a representative of her people. Jesus crosses a boundary and invites the Samaritans to a new relationship—faith in him and worship of the One God in spirit and truth.

This woman without a name evangelizes her town. Later tradition gives her a name, Photina, the one who carries light to her people. She leaves behind her jar for carrying water and carries instead the good news to her townspeople.

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well... Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #2560-61, also 728

FAITH in ACTION

Enact the gospel prayer drama below. Think about boundaries in your life and world that need to be broken down. Add what you think it is time for at the end of the prayer drama. Place an empty water pitcher or jar at the center of your group.

NARRATOR: Let us imagine what happened when the woman went back into the city where she lived.

WOMAN: I went to the well, my water jug on my head. A man, a Jew no less, said to me, "Ask me for living water, so you will never thirst again." I asked. I liked the idea of never carrying water again. He was talking about more than water, about spirit within each of us reaching for God, and about a new community that worships in spirit and truth anywhere. I knew who he was. I left my water jar where it stood and ran to my village.

"Come, come and see, my neighbors and friends. One like Moses has come to the well. He says God is spirit and wants people to worship in spirit and truth. Come, he told me he is the one we've been waiting for."

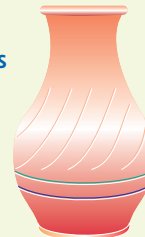
VILLAGERS: Woman of God, we must meet the one you tell us about. Perhaps indeed the time has come.

ALL: Many townspeople came to believe in Jesus on the strength of the woman's word.

VILLAGERS: Jesus is the savior of the world.

JESUS: As God has sent me, I send you. I pray for the women and men I send in my name and for all those who will believe because of their words.

LEADER: Let us remember the people on whose word we believe in Jesus. Let us



write their names on a piece of paper, and place them in the water jar, saying their names aloud. (Pause)

ALL: We worship God in spirit and truth. We leave our water jars, for the Spirit is welling up within us.

JESUS: If some say, "But you are a woman,"

ALL: We will say, "The time has come to worship God in spirit and truth."

JESUS: If some say, "But you are not our color,"

ALL: We will say, "The time has come to worship God in spirit and truth."

JESUS: If some say, "But you are young and don't count."

ALL: We will say, "The time has come to worship God in spirit and truth."

EACH: The time has come for...

Add your own statement to these words.