



Our Philosophy of Mission and Outreach:
How Jesus Evangelized and How We Do Too

by

Tony Blair and Jo Ann Kunz, Senior Pastors

Hosanna! A Fellowship of Christians
Lititz, Pennsylvania

breaking rules, breaking barriers, and breaking chains

© 2010

Introduction

This philosophy statement for mission and outreach is intended to help us understand how Jesus evangelized, specifically by looking at his interactions with a woman at a Samaritan well, a story recorded in Gospel of John 4:1-42. (The quotations in this document are from the New Living Translation.) This was not his only evangelistic conversation, of course, and a fuller portrayal of Jesus' ministry was provided in the Sunday worship services of January, 2010.

There we looked first at Jesus' ministry in the synagogue, where he showed up as prophet to challenge people in the religious system to see and participate in the kingdom of God. Then we looked at Jesus' ministry in the "sinner's house," where he showed up as friend to remind people who felt marginalized that they were still loved by their God. And now, in this story, he shows up in Samaria, in a cross-cultural setting, as a Shepherd and Savior to those who were on the outside. In each situation...and in others...Jesus "evangelized." He shared and lived out the Good News of the Kingdom, often in ways that were startling then...and equally startling now.

We encourage you to read this with fresh eyes, putting aside any preconceptions or assumptions that you (and we) may bring to this question of evangelism from our own experience. Let's see it through Jesus' eyes...and, then, perhaps, do as He did.

Jesus Refuses to Play the Church Growth Game

¹Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John ²(though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). ³So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

By our contemporary standards, Jesus is being successful! His church is growing. He is teaching, winning over the hearts of people, who are repenting and coming forward for baptism, like they or others had for John. Under his leadership, his disciples are baptizing...and apparently in increasing numbers...for it becomes obvious to anyone watching (particularly the Pharisees, who are watching closely) that Jesus now has more people coming to him than John does.

If this story were set in 21st century America, we would be noting where the people are going...and concluding that God is blessing Jesus, that he is doing "something right" because people want to come to "His church." And we would bemoan the loss of vision or momentum experienced by John, who must be experiencing some sort of leadership crisis or spiritual obstacle that is preventing his work from growing at the same pace.

But Jesus will have nothing to do with such thinking! He's not counting heads...and when there are lots of heads present at one of his gatherings, it seems that there's bound to be trouble.

Shortly after this thousands are together to hear him teach and, moved by compassion, he fed them. They, of course, missed the point and thought that he was about the feeding, not the teaching. They wanted to crown him king...so they could use him.

Jesus has a visceral distaste for being used. He reacted strongly when that large crowd missed the point and so he gave them some heavy-duty theology (about him being “the bread of life”) that seems to have intentionally scared many of them away. He criticized his disciples when they began jockeying for positions of power and authority, reminding them, as he reminded others all along the way, that the path he was walking was one of suffering. It was not about power, or popularity.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” he said often, discouraging those who wanted to just be hangers-on in His kingdom. “Don’t give me the crowds,” he seemed to be asking His Father, “for there is temptation and distraction in them. Give me those who seriously seek You and Your Kingdom, which I have come here to proclaim and initiate.” And so, finding himself in a church-growth competition with John the Baptist, Jesus leaves. He’s not going to play that game. He’s taking his ball and going home. And he’s taking his teammates with him.

Jesus Breaks Rules and Barriers

⁴He had to go through Samaria on the way. ⁵Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. ⁷Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” ⁸He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. ⁹The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

Much has been made of the comment that he “had” to go through Samaria. It was actually the longest route between Judea and Galilee, but it was probably the easiest traveling. Jews who traveled between the two Jewish regions tended to tip-toe pretty quickly through Samaria, perhaps holding their noses as they did, perhaps much like some rural or suburban people will do today if they have to drive through some of the less savory sections of our cities. In any case, Jesus had to go that way, that day, because there was a divine appointment waiting for him. And it’s quite important to our story that this appointment was there, in Samaria...and not in Jerusalem, Capernaum, or one of the other “safer” places in the biblical story.

To get to Samaria Jesus had to go to the margins of Jewish society...to the land of those who were regarded as ethnically and religiously suspect. They were regarded as “less than” and “other than” by those who regarded themselves as pure blooded defenders of the faith. As a Jew,

Jesus had to leave his own comfort zone, the place where he was regarded as “one of us” and instead chose to interact with “one of them.” This he was willing to do.

The place where his path and that of this woman met was on the margins of her society. It was at Jacob’s well, outside of the town of Sychar, perhaps a mile or so outside. And much has been made of the fact that she was there at noon, rather than when women traditionally gathered their water: in the morning and in the evening. It’s easy to conclude that she, too, is marginalized. And here she is, someone on the periphery of her own community, traveling out to the well to seek nourishment and sustenance. And so they meet on the margins...outside of town, outside of comfort zones, outside of the usual times and practices.

And this situation got even more uncomfortable. He was male and she was female. The problem wasn’t that a man and a woman would be talking in private outside of town. The problem was what they would be assumed to be talking about...or planning, or doing. And, as we’re to see, this is a woman with a reputation. So Jesus, the Holy One of God, was risking His reputation for holiness to break the barrier between them. He broke a rule to save a soul.

We should not be surprised...at all!...if Jesus invites us to do the same thing. To go out to the margins and find the people who hang out there, far away from the centers of power and popularity. To break down some of the barriers that divide people from each other...and keep us from all that God has for humanity. To break some of the human rules that prevent us from knowing God and experiencing Him. Jesus has little patience for those silly rules. Ask the Pharisees.

Jesus Has A Surprising Conversation

¹⁰Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.” ¹¹“But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? ¹²And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?” ¹³Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” ¹⁵“Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

Jesus initiates this conversation. He has a habit of doing that. But notice what he says. He asks for a favor, a drink. He was thirsty and he had no bucket to lower into this deep well in order to drink. Lots of clean, cool water, just under his feet but out of reach. Now, we know something about Jesus that this woman doesn’t...not yet. We know his power. We know he’s perfectly

capable of drawing water out of that well if he really wants to. He's capable of creating water right there on the spot!

But he chooses not to do it that way. In fact, that was one of the temptations given to him in the wilderness...the temptation to use his divine power to meet his own temporary needs ("make bread from rocks"), rather than to invite others into the story. So his question is also an invitation. "Will you engage me?" he is saying. "Will you break a rule, will you step out of your comfort zone, as I have just done? Will you notice me sitting here?"

She noticed. And she asks the obvious question; she wonders why he has broken with social convention to initiate this conversation. He has startled her...again, something Jesus is fond of doing...but the surprise is not one of dismay but of curiosity. Note that Jesus does not answer her question. He does not explain his rule-breaking or barrier-crushing. That's not his agenda here; that's merely means to an end. He has something to offer Her and is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to let her know.

So what's he offering? She probably suspects that he is offering sex. Or money for sex. Or something else for money. When the rest of the world breaks rules and barriers, it's often because there's an ulterior motive. They want something from us. We have reason to be suspicious of such people. That's why so many react negatively when we invade their space or make them feel uncomfortable in our presentation of the Gospel. Sooner or later, they expect to find out that we have a hidden agenda. When we give things away, they look for the fine print. When we invite them to an event, they expect to be snookered.

And far too often they are. We do not always have the greatest integrity in our evangelism. We can lead people along in a relationship and then hit them with something that smacks of a multi-level marketing presentation. We can confront people on the street and startle them with dismay at our rudeness or effrontery. We can knock on their door and cause them to feel defensive in their own homes.

Jesus' approach is startling, yes, but startlingly different from all that. He meets this woman at her place, at her time, and gives her the upper hand in the conversation right from the beginning. He honors her with his request, and then empowers her by allowing her to decide if and how she would engage him. And I suspect he smiles when she chooses to do so.

And then he initiates a surprising conversation. It's surprising in part because he is so much more up front about his identity with this woman than he is with nearly anyone else. As we're about to see, he knows her. Really knows her. And it's obvious that he wants her to know him! With those who are standoffish and judgmental, he is reticent. With this woman who is direct and

brash, he is remarkably open, even with a hint of teasing in his voice. “This is who I am,” he says. “You’ve been waiting for me.”

And indeed she has. She’s thirsty. That’s true in a literal sense, of course...she’s at a well with an empty bucket. But you can hear the eagerness in her voice. Living water? That’s what the ancients called running water, the kind of water that didn’t just stand still at the bottom of a well, but flowed freely and apparently endlessly, the kind of water that would slake one’s thirst in the noontime sun and still be there to wash down dinner and continue to flow for a drink before bedtime. If you live a mile away from the well, living water would sound pretty wonderful, wouldn’t it? She thinks so! And she’s bold enough...or thirsty enough...to risk the “catch” in the deal. She asks for the water.

And, of course, we know that Jesus was talking about living water in a metaphorical sense as well. And she does too. She’s not dumb. This guy doesn’t have a bucket, much less a river in his pocket. Not even a bubbling brook. He does not have any free-flowing, never-ending, cool, clear water to offer her, particularly in quantities that will slake her thirst forever. But he does have *something*, doesn’t he? He calls it water that “wells up” to eternal life! And she wants it.

Don’t we all? We might not understand what it is that we want, or what to call it, or where to get it. But we do know that what we offer people...if we’re true to the Gospel...is what the human heart cries out for. There’s no need to mislead people about what it is. There’s no need to package it. There’s no need to pretend it’s something other than what it is. It’s the love of God for human hearts that are bleeding through open wounds. It’s the grace of God for human souls that are hardened by pain and rejection. It’s the power of God for human wills that have been beaten into subjection and passivity.

Our opportunity in evangelism, then, is not to persuade people to take a bitter-tasting pill. It’s not to get them to buy into our message or our church or our system of beliefs. It’s not to impose a burden of guilt, shame, or fear on the other person. Jesus doesn’t do any of these things! He simply introduces himself in a personal encounter and offers what she already wants. What she already knows she needs. *Love*.

The Woman Has a Surprising Conversion

¹⁶“Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her. ¹⁷“I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied. Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!” ¹⁹“Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet. ²⁰So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?” ²¹Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is

coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. ²³But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. ²⁴For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” ²⁵The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶Then Jesus told her, “I Am the Messiah!”

The moralistic bent of our faith gets a little unbent here, doesn’t it? Jesus has already broken rules by talking with a Samaritan woman. But now we find out exactly what kind of woman she is. We get a glimpse into her character. And it’s not a pretty picture. No, we’re not told motives or details; we don’t know why she had five husbands or what happened to them. But the picture is pretty clear, isn’t it? She’s shacking up with a man, her sixth at least, and this one without even the pretense or benefit of marriage.

Here’s a wonderful opportunity for the Holy One of God to set her straight. He can tell her about family values and how her lifestyle is destroying their society. He can quote biblical passages to her and call her to repent of her sinful behavior. He can cluck-cluck and condescend to her, wayward miscreant that she is. He can offer her the four spiritual laws and have her confront her sinfulness and need of redemption. He can pray over her for the salvation of her soul.

He does none of that! It’s amazing. He has available to him all of those options, the ones that Christians have historically used in such circumstances, and he abjures them all in favor of a truly startling turn in the conversation: *He talks theology with her.*

This is perhaps even more startling when we realize whom Jesus had just come from, according to John. In his third chapter, John records Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who had extensive theological training. With him Jesus discusses childbirth. With this woman, probably well experienced with childbirth but with no theological training, he discusses the theology of worship.

Why does He do this? Because she wants to. She brings it up. And He honors her question. He engages her on the matter that is either foremost on her mind, or a matter that she regards as much “safer” than the subject of her relationships with men. Either way, it’s her choice, and he allows her to talk about what she wants. Never, anywhere in this conversation, does He impose himself upon her. He asks, he responds, he suggests...but he never pushes, demands, or judges.

He makes the conversation safe for her. She discovers that he knows...he really does know her...but does not condemn her. She reminds us of another nameless woman, the one caught in

adultery, another story from John's Gospel, a woman whose sin is public and obvious, and Jesus not only refuses to condemn but discourages others, full of righteous fury, from condemning as well. "Go and sin no more," he counsels, and off she runs.

This woman is not even given that admonition. But she is given a gift: the gift of being able to see Jesus for who he truly is. She concludes first that he is a prophet, because he knows things, things that no stranger could know unless he had some special revelation from God. Does this scare her? We don't know. We see that she takes advantage of the rare opportunity to dialogue with a prophet and thus questions him about worship.

At the end of that brief exchange, she wants more. Of course she wants more! She's not there at the well talking to a stranger simply so she can figure out where is the best place to worship, after all. That's not the real desire of her heart. And so she expresses her hope...that a day will come when the desires will be fulfilled, when the questions will be answered, perhaps when her marginalization will end. That is the day when the Chosen One of God will appear, will explain it all, and will make all things right.

And then Jesus says the most startling thing of all: "I'm the one. I'm the one you've been waiting for. I'm the answer to your questions. I'm the one who brings the good news of the Kingdom of God. I'm here, right in front of you."

And she believes. Her conversion is a lifetime in coming but is complete in a minute. But look carefully at this moment of conversion. She prays no sinner's prayer. She confesses no sin. She asks no forgiveness. It's not that those things didn't happen in the privacy of her heart or in a public manner somewhere along the way. But at this moment in time her conversion consists simply of finding God in the face of Jesus, recognizing Him there, and responding to what she sees and hears.

She reminds us to be very wary of formulaic approaches to conversion. Some become pilgrims on the way to heaven before they even know what road they're on. Some come into the Kingdom of God kicking and screaming, but drawn inexorably by God's grace. Some are invited in with dramatic effects and respond with equal drama. Some are changed permanently in a quiet, heartfelt instant.

We don't know what form this woman's conversion took, what her life was like after Jesus left. We don't know her confession of faith or where she did end up worshipping. But we do know that Jesus revealed himself to her and that she responded with alacrity and delight, so much so that she forgot the one thing she had come to do (get water) and ended up doing what was perhaps the hardest thing in the world for her to do (talk to people who didn't like her). Something changes when people encounter Jesus.

The Others Have a Surprising Discovery

²⁷*Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?”*

²⁸*The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone,*

²⁹*“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?”*

³⁰*So the people came streaming from the village to see him..* ³⁹*Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!”*

Jesus keeps catching people by surprise. Every time we think we've got him figured out, we've got him all nicely tied up in a box that's safe and comfortable, he does something we don't expect. As C.S. Lewis observed about Aslan, the lion Christ-figure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he's good but he's not safe.

That seems to be the experience of his disciples. They think they understand what they've signed on for; after all, several of them were disciples of John the Baptist, and that was a fairly self-explanatory mission. They were to live in the desert, eat funny things, wear funny clothes, thunder at people to repent, and then invite them to be baptized. So when Jesus comes along, they start doing much of the same things, including the baptizing, except that they're wandering through town and village, rather than camping in the wilderness.

But Jesus isn't calling people to repent. Or, rather, the only ones he seems intent on requiring repentance from are those that seem to have no need of it. And whenever he encounters a genuine sinner, he seems to go “soft” on them. He speaks tenderly. He lets them off the hook. No judgment, no demands, no guilt trip. He even...well, sometimes seems to be just a tad too *friendly* with them. The disciples are expecting to wear hair shirts and eat bugs and Jesus is wining and dining with notorious men and women. They're expecting to look down their noses at sinners and he's treating them with respect and honor. He appears to even enjoy their company quite a bit more than that of the righteous folks. And that just ticks off some people, the deeply religious ones. The Holy One of God is accused of not being holy enough!

Even if the disciples are beginning to understand the nature of the Kingdom that Jesus is here to announce, they are more concerned about the “public relations” angle of his ministry than he is. “How does it look? What does this do to your “witness?” you can imagine them asking. “People look up to you. You're a leader. You should set an example.” And what they mean by that is that he should hang out with and do ministry with the right kind of people...people like themselves.

When they find him talking privately with a Samaritan woman at a well outside of town, they are understandably concerned. “Can't we let him alone for even a few minutes?” No, they can't. Did they miss the point? It didn't require 12 men to buy bread! Jesus was obviously shooing them

away, knowing that there was an important conversation to be had, and if they were there, they'd probably try to mess it up. Remember when the little children wanted to see Jesus? Yes, it was his disciples, playing security guards, who tried their darndest to keep the little ones away from the master.

So the disciples want to question him. Or, rather, they want to interrogate him. And the woman, understanding their suspicions, runs away. She doesn't run from Jesus...no, she's met someone extraordinary there and her life is changed as result. But she does run from his followers, just like so many people in our world who respect or admire Jesus from afar, but don't approach him because his disciples, his security guards, are putting up barriers to knowing him.

What would the disciples have done had they been us? Would they have expected that the woman approach Jesus in a church building, full of unfamiliar music and rituals, rather than at a well? Would they have expected that she clean herself up a bit, make herself presentable, in order to appropriately honor the Messiah? Would they have expected that she walk down an aisle or raise her hand or kneel at an altar in order to approach Jesus? Maybe there would have been an understated expectation of buying into certain political beliefs as part of the package of conversion?

Maybe not. But we know the temptation to require something in addition to loving Jesus. This woman leaves before the disciples can impose those expectations on her, before they can try to pull back the Master from this conversation of intimate, knowing love. And she runs to her community, the people she has likely known all her life, the people who also know her, her reputation, and her foibles. These are the people who have marginalized her, who have made her life so uncomfortable that she's drawing water in the heat of midday rather than having to endure the companionship of other women in the morning.

But today she comes in from the margins. Today she gets to be the messenger of the kingdom. Today she brings salvation to Sychar. "Come see this man," she pleads. And there's something compelling in her cry...perhaps the surprise that a stranger would indeed be able to tell her everything she ever did, perhaps her boldness in alluding to the things she had done, perhaps her intimation that this is the long-awaited Messiah. Whatever the reason, today she is persuasive, and they go. One at a time or in groups, they trek out to the margins, out to the well, to encounter the one who knows things about them...and loves them anyway. They find there the same wonder that she had found.

Jesus Lives at the Margins

⁴⁰When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, ⁴¹long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. ⁴²Then they said to the

woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Jesus had left the center (Judea) to go to the margins (Samaria). The woman had left the center (her town) to go to the margins (the well). In their social lives, both he and she already lived on the margins, disapproved of by good people, comfortable with those of questionable reputations. And, in the end, both are invited in to the center, into the community. Jesus is invited to stay in Sychar for a while, and he accepts that invitation. He is quite comfortable in this cross-cultural setting. How the disciples felt about staying in a Samaritan town is not recorded.

And the people of the town have their own, firsthand encounter with Jesus, as they are not content with a secondhand faith. Neither should we be. Yet they acknowledge her central role in their own conversions. She who was outside is now inside. She who was lost is now found. She who was thirsty is now satisfied. She is the founder of their faith community.

Here, then, is an opportunity for us. It is difficult often to gain the attention of those at the center, those who are satiated with power or contented with stuff. As Jesus was fond of saying of such people, “They have their reward.” It should not surprise us that it is so often those at the margins who are most responsive to the love of this Messiah. They know their need. They feel their thirst. And they respond eagerly to a genuine, authentic invitation to encounter the One who can satisfy that thirst with living water. And it should not surprise us that it is among such people that Jesus is known for showing up.

So let us also not fear to hang out at the margins...at the well outside of town, in the company of disreputable people, on the edges of society. Let us not fear to be Jesus in such places and with such faces, for this is his heartbeat, this is his pattern. Jesus is a “boundary leader.” He leads and loves from the boundaries...and is often rejected at the center. He was *crucified* by the folks at the center, the people with power. And so he invites us to live with him on the boundaries as well. And if we instead desire the rewards of living at the center? He has an answer for that: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

This is the story of a man and a woman, a Redeemer and his redeemed, God and his beloved. It is a story set in history, in particular time and place. What does this mean to us? How do we who follow Jesus today do missions and evangelism in our own time and place? What does a church like Hosanna!, committed to breaking rules, breaking barriers, and breaking chains, pledged to proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, take from this to guide our own efforts at spreading the good news of the Kingdom?

How Hosanna! Does Mission and Outreach

Using the story of this encounter between Jesus and his Samaritan woman as our guide, we develop, articulate, and live out the following principles:

1. We resist the temptation to compete with others in a popularity contest for souls. Instead, we bless all those who are drawing people to Jesus and cooperate with them, whenever possible, for the good of the Kingdom.
2. We follow Jesus out of our comfort zones to go out to the boundaries of our own society to encounter those who live at the margins. We follow Jesus across cultural barriers, we break human rules, and we demolish spiritual chains, wherever he leads us.
3. We listen and do not impose; we invite and do not condemn. Our model is the example of Jesus who made it safe for others to talk about the Kingdom, and not that of the disciples, whose prejudices and rules erected barriers to meeting Jesus.
4. We honor those with whom we engage. We treat their questions with respect and honor their spiritual experiences. We see in them the image of God and trust that they can see in us the love of Christ.
5. We offer Jesus as sufficient for salvation. We do not manipulate or shame people into the Kingdom. We do not add to nor detract from the simple message of the Gospel: That God has entered the world through Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Savior.
6. We share our stories of redemption with our own communities, inviting them to encounter Jesus as well. We invite Jesus into our church, our families, and our communities, and ask him to reveal himself to us and transform us.

These principles are our commitments. They are not burdens on our shoulders, nor duties to fulfill. They represent our privilege, our joyful response to the grace of God, our grateful retelling of our own liberating encounters with Jesus, when we were at the margins of our own lives. In pursuing these commitments, we pursue God, the lover of our souls. We believe he is at work in the world and so we desire to find him and to follow him. And when we do, we delight in participating with him, for he invites us to be his coworkers in the Kingdom he is already creating in, through, and for us. In the Kingdom Jesus came to announce. In the Kingdom of love where He is Lord of all.