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-- About 25 years ago, Ted came to the parish I served at as an associate pastor. He was interested in the Catholic Church. There were a few complications, though. The greatest was that he was in his 4th marriage, and his wife was in her second.

-- Fortunately, our pastor was a canon lawyer, and he was able to work through the papers and annulments required. He accepted Ted as he was. He helped him to grow in faith, and he was baptized that year.

-- Within a few years, he was the RCIA director for the parish. He served there, and then at a neighboring parish in the same position until a few years ago. Many people have come into the Catholic faith with his help.

-- I think of Ted when I encounter this story about Jesus with the woman at the well. Jesus broke nearly all the social conventions of his day to speak to an unaccompanied woman who was a Samaritan. Jews didn't even use things that a Samaritan used, like a water jar or bucket.

-- The woman had come to the well at high noon to escape the groups of women who came there in the morning. She probably thought they'd be gossiping about her, and she was probably right.

-- But she didn't escape Jesus. Unlike those women, he wasn't there to criticize her, but to engage her in a faith conversation. He encountered a woman who'd been broken by life. How much was her fault and how much was due to things beyond her control, we don't know.

-- It didn't matter to Jesus. He met her where she was in life. He promised her a greater life. He penetrated her defenses. He showed genuine love to her by gradually leading her to grasp God's new life.

-- Fr. Jim Auth modeled the attitude of Jesus to me in the way he treated Ted. Now, Ted may have been one wife short of the number of husbands this biblical woman had, but the result was very similar.

-- Just like that woman at the well, he went out and told others of how he'd found true faith. And many others came to believe through him.

-- It's no wonder this gospel story is used during the rites for our catechumens who are preparing for the Easter sacraments. For that

woman came to faith through Jesus' words to her, and she went to her neighbors to spread the good news. Then they heard it from Jesus himself.

-- This message, though, is not just for those preparing for the Easter sacraments. For there are many others who are broken by life like that woman. We can be instruments of faith for them, by accepting them where they are at and leading them to Jesus' saving life.

-- One particular way most of us can do that is by our contacts with Catholics who have left the active practice of the faith. Most of us know several of them. We probably work and socialize with them.

-- Some of them have been hurt by life. Some have had broken marriages. A few may have had a bad experience with a priest or a parish staff member. Like that woman, they need acceptance.

-- At the same time, they need an invitation to be renewed in faith. We can be the means for that invitation. But first, we need to accept them as human beings.

-- If you would survey parishes in the USA, a large percentage have RCIA directors who themselves came into the Catholic Church as adults. Many of them had broken lives before that, and they may still have wounds and issues they deal with.

-- But their faith helps them go forward and share with others who are searching for greater faith. We can all be a part of this process, even if (perhaps especially if) we've have past emotional or spiritual wounds.

-- Like Ted... like that woman at the well.... We can lead someone we know to seek the Lord. And the Lord himself will take it from there.