

John 4:4-18  
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Hampton Baptist  
Charles R. Smith

### "This Man Is Not Normal"

Some of you remember a newspaper column entitled *Dear Abby*. Amy Mulrooney wrote a letter to *Dear Abby* hoping that the stranger who helped her at a busy airport in Washington state would see her letter and know how much she appreciated his generosity.

Amy flew to Pullman for an interview for admission to Washington State University's Veterinary School. Before she left, she made reservations for a rental car and a motel room. She had planned everything, hoping to have a couple of hours of peace and quiet in her motel room before her important interview.

That wasn't quite how things turned out, however. At the airport, Amy went to the rental car agency, intending to pay for it with her credit card. To her great dismay, her credit card was not accepted. She had made a payment five days earlier and was certain it would clear by the time she arrived in Washington, but it didn't. Amy had no other way to pay for either the car rental or the motel room. "So there I was," Amy wrote, "stranded at the airport." She went immediately to a pay phone to call her roommate back in California. She was upset and crying hysterically.

It was while Amy was on the phone that a gentleman came up next to her. She thought he wanted to use the telephone when he tapped her on the shoulder. The unknown gentleman handed Amy a one-hundred dollar bill and walked away. Amy never even got a chance to find out who he was or even thank him. He disappeared in the crowd.

"I want him to know that I was accepted in Washington State's veterinary school," Amy wrote to *Dear Abby*, "so not only did this anonymous benefactor make it possible for me to arrive on time for my interview, he made it possible for me to get into vet school." Amy said she will remember her experience for the rest of her life.

"This man is not normal" is a statement that could be said of the man who helped Amy Mulrooney. It is certainly out of the ordinary for a person to walk up to a total stranger and give them a one-hundred dollar bill. That kind of generosity is not normal.

A definition of the word "normal" is "conforming to what is expected in the ordinary course of events." Looking at our New Testament Lesson today, this glimpse at the life of Jesus communicated that this man was not normal.

I understand that "normal" is a relative term. Degrees of normalcy are assigned by culture, gender, age and even religion. I may consider certain behavior *normal*, while you may find that particular conduct abominable. Such is the case many times between teenagers and their parents. What the youth may define as *normal* is translated as *abnormal* to the parent. Normal behavior for an avid fan at a University of Georgia football game includes barking. Regularly. At every kick-off. For some non-Bulldogs, this type of behavior may be seen as abnormal.

In the gospel text, Jesus initiated conversation with a Samaritan woman; some may say "big deal." That's right; it *was* a big deal. Number one, during that time, women were treated as property and had no status. Even Jewish rabbis would not speak to women in public. But Jesus spoke to her.

Number two, when Jesus spoke to her, he knew about her past and the kind of life she led. Her reputation was irrelevant to him. He knew that she had gone through five husbands and was now living with yet another man. By Jewish standards and even by Christian standards today, she was a *known* sinner. To have gone through five husbands and to live with one other man was not exactly trying to sweep her sins under the rug.

She probably did not care who knew the kind of life she lived. Sychar was a small town, and word travels fast in a small town. She had a bad reputation, yet Jesus spoke to her.

Number three, she was a Samaritan--this was the big one. Jews and Samaritans clashed worse than Redskin and Cowboy fans. Their relationship was probably akin to the bond between pro-lifers and those who are pro-choicer. The Samaritans were a mixed race as a result of inter-marriage of the poor Jews left in Babylon after the exile. These poor Jews were helpless, and they married Babylonians and people from surrounding regions. The Jews considered the Samaritans mongrels. John even recorded in verse nine, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Yet Jesus spoke to her.

Her response was "Why are you speaking to me--you being a Jew and I being a Samaritan woman?" Her thoughts may have been, "This man is not normal." He had spoken to her despite that fact that she was a woman, that she had a bad reputation, and that she was a Samaritan. These facts proved that Jesus was not normal.

Had Jesus been typical, he probably would not have spoken to the Samaritan woman at all. Speaking to her showed an interest in her. His acceptance of her showed her that *he* was different.

So because of this acceptance, Jesus then offered her the gospel. We have to show people that we love them before they will know it. Without accepting a person, we cannot love a person. The Samaritan woman would not have listened to anything that Jesus said to her without first feeling accepted. Jesus broke down the barriers so that he could offer her the gospel. He did not condemn her. He did not look down on her. He did not holler or scream at her. He did not even plead, beg, or try to manipulate her into the Kingdom of God by some scare tactic. He simply told her that there was a better way of living. This living water, of which Jesus spoke, was a never-ending well of peace, hope, and love. He spoke of an abundant life full of meaning and purpose. And for the woman at the well, these actions were not normal.

So how have things changed from the time of Christ to the present? Our world is a diverse one--one where people can be very different from each other. Sometimes the differences are drastic. We encounter different people every day, and most times, we have no idea what their needs are. Sometimes we see people who want to fit in so badly, that we see a lot of clones, at least in speech and in attire. We even see people who rebel against society and its norms. Their hair is of a different cut and color and style from "normal" people their age. Just as during the time of Christ, we will encounter people who are different from us, but just because they are different, we are not to overlook their needs. To take the gospel into today's world, we have to look past what we may view as "normal." Instead, we have to accept individuals just as they are; only then will we be able to share about the "living water."

I am truly thankful that Jesus was not normal, that he went out of his way to help the downtrodden, to uplift the lonely, to minister to the outcast. I am sure that you echo this sense of thanksgiving that our Savior accepts all people. But how does this thankfulness move us? Are we so grateful that we try to emulate his actions? Let's talk about what *is* normal and acceptable today.

In our society, it is normal to accept things as they are, to just ride in the boat of life and not rock it, even though it may be floating toward some turbulent water. Just come to church once a week, pray and read your Bible occasionally, surround yourself with Christian friends so that you are shielded from the world, and everything will be just fine. This is normal. Keep your eyes closed to a hurting world who needs Jesus and mingle with those who make you feel comfortable. Do not seek to help the poor, because they should find themselves jobs. After all, this is twenty-first century America. There is no reason to be poor.

Do not give your time to the less fortunate but occasionally give some money to help ease your conscience. Do not give your time even once, because you may be asked to help again and you just don't want to get involved. After all, you are a busy person, and your time is precious. This is normal.

Talk about how bad our world is and how you wish it could be different. Talk about how sorry you feel for the hungry in the third-world countries and even in America. Talk about how awful it is that thousands of people, mostly women and children, die every day because of hunger and malnutrition. But do not talk about these things too much because it makes you feel bad, and Christians are supposed to be happy. After all, that is normal.

I am afraid that American Christianity has become far too normal. It is normal to talk about the problems, needs and hurts of our society. It is not normal to take action. It is normal to be happy because of our beautiful

buildings and furnishings. It is not normal to question how we spend our money on ourselves in the name of religion.

It is not normal to accept others unconditionally, whether they be black, Hispanic, Asian, people with HIV-AIDS, the poor, neo-nazis, or sinners. After all, Jesus accepted others unconditionally, and his behavior was not seen as normal. On the contrary, it was seen as radical. Following the revolutionary behavior of Jesus will not make you popular and even may anger some people. But this radical behavior can be used by God to change people's lives.

The living water that Jesus gave to the woman at the well changed her life, just as it has changed my life. I hope that your life too has been changed by this living water that Jesus offers. If not, in a moment, you will have a chance to become a Christian and to make a commitment to live and respond as Jesus did.

During the time of Christ, many people either thought or said, "This man is not normal." While I was a campus minister at Virginia Tech twenty-five years ago, one of our students had a sticker on his car that read, "Why be normal?" Today, I pose the same question, "Why be normal?" Instead, I encourage you to love radically and liberally and act on that love, just as Jesus did.