

Episode 9: Conversations in the Gospel of John

Stan:

This is Conversations in the Gospel of John. we now continue our conversation with Jamie Clark-Soles

Jaime:

yeah it's so unruly I mean the other thing to notice again we mentioned this with the mystical but you know something very particular about Christian mysticism anyway which you know I don't know all other things I just know Christianity I mean our stuff always is supposed to be worked out in community always so the community is essential it's not bonus it's not extra for us to even discern if a mystical encounter you know was Godly or for it to be transformative fine as far as it goes and when we think of many individual encounters you know the Samaritan woman certainly I would say had a mystical experience right when she had her theophany of Jesus saying I am and right but the first thing she does is run to community and create Community right Mary Magdalene sees the resurrected Jesus at the end right great mystical transforms her life gives her herself back Etc what's the first thing she does go to community and build community so I think that's also instructive for pastors I wish them well because this is where I think one of the many challenges is convincing the rest of us that Community is essential and is not bonus that you actually cannot live a life of Christian discipleship at least the way John imagines it and it's more like to everybody from Genesis to Revelation you cannot be a Christian disciple fully with without community and I mean Community not just showing up on Sunday and our Sunday finest but getting us to really let our hair down so to speak

Stan:

it goes back to those words that you used earlier it's vulnerable

Jaime:

it's so vulnerable

Stan:

and and the fact is Mary Magdalene's community did not believe her yeah right when they go back to tell the community they don't believe them and it is it is one of those challenges of the community that if this is not something that happens periodically we don't believe that such is possible because of our training that God is over there and we're just supposed to follow God and at the end things will happen but that's not a Biblical concept and it is

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definitely not Johanne concept that God is somewhere else God is walking around here on the planet

Jaime:

I love what you're saying I mean what I kind of hear you saying is we've lost capacity to be surprised by God or if we haven't lost it we certainly it's a muscle we've let atrophy we don't really expect God to do something new um is what I hear you saying and I agree if that's what if that's what you're saying

Stan:

the same new in my life it's not God not new in the tradition not new in the tradition but new in my life no right new in our right

Jaime:

right and that's when I think we're scripture you and I love scripture so much and so so do the pastors right because typically when people have an experience without belittling it it's not a belittling it to say that is new that is amazing and let me show you where it fits into the larger Narrative of the Christian story you're not the first one to have that kind of experience so let's put it in the context of our larger story of scripture um and of course your point about people not believing Mary Magdalene of course like you said when people go out of the box when they are so moved and God shows up in this um different kind of surprising way we typically resist and you see that with Judas he's like what is happening here I'm against this um and so again I think that's something to learn from the story is if we are going to follow vulnerability and hospitality uh and the mystical and the emotional the central if we're going to be all in and allow ourselves to take risks we are going to experience um opposition which is why I think the farewell discourse I love it because Jesus is like guess what they hated me first so heads up it's going to be tough out there but it's all good I've overcome the world you don't have to be distressed when it happens know that I already said it and know that you are fully equipped to move straight ahead and not crumple up in despair you know

Stan:

yeah and as we as we think about that and we start looking towards you know just making some more specifics out of this one of the challenges that um we face in living a genuine life of faith in God is that there are many people who are living a life of Faith but they're defining the parameters there's freedom tremendous freedom in not trying to conform to social

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standards but actually conforming to what God is calling you to do to be hospitable to open your door to the strangers and other people who may not be there

Jaime:

but you're exactly right about the mystical by the way I mean this is why the church has always had a problem with the mystics while the mystics are living and currently active right it's easy to love them when they're dead and gone but they don't care about they can't care I mean they have this serious overflowing Psalm 23 my cup overfloweth it's not me what Paul says it's not it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me raised caught up to the third heaven I mean when people have these Mystical like Mary Magdalene I mean she encounters the Risen Jesus she didn't know it was going to happen she was on the receiving end of it it's not mystical encounters aren't generated they happen to people right they're they are they're given by God but the mystical is never really going to fit in too easily but hopefully we can make make bigger and bigger and bigger space for that to happen and yeah and to just not be against it and say because nothing new can happen then truly nothing new can happen in the holy spirit it's all tied in it's all tied into to the holy spirit because if we really believe in the Holy Spirit which the Gospel of John really really really does I mean hang on buckle your seat Belt

Stan:

well the other part that we have to deal with that I think you're skirting the edges of just a little bit I want to narrow down to is that the tendency past 50 years 60 years however long we can remember it and before that has been one of Conformity everyone being alike and so the problem between in genders is that they're not alike we don't value one or the other because it's not like me and so experiences that are mystical we want to narrow down to the point of as your pastor said my my partitioners are dying to have some sort of experience of Christ but the problem is once I do that my experience as a male with arthritis in my back the things I'm going to experience and the things you're going to experience as female will not ever be in Conformity because we experience life differently

Jaime:

yeah but that requires a real humility don't you think

Stan:

well I think that is part of the

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Jaime:

requires a humility to say that I can learn from your experience and that your experience is at least as valuable as mine and real and if we put all the pieces together we might be starting to approach something like what God is

Stan:

but as you said earlier as a as a Community of Faith as the P pastor we pull that experience back into the Community of Faith this this is unusual for you it's not unusual for the biblical account this dream you're having is unusual in the current circumstances it is not outside the Realms of the biblical story

Jaime:

part of my goal in this work and this book is to I don't want to say give people our tradition back but people shouldn't have to ask that question we should be able to know from Genesis to revelation God God communicates and um through God communicates that way God and and I'm not saying everybody has to be a Mystic by the way but we all have emotions and we all have bodies so I do want to say that but here's the thing so I was talking to somebody they say well I don't believe in God speaking through dreams okay that's fine but once you say that God cannot speak to you through a dream I'm not saying God can't find another way to speak to you but also I think it's instructive to read our scriptures and look and see all the way throughout how has God communicated to individuals and whole communities and does my current spiritual my my Christian walk allow for God to for me to encounter and experience God in all of these ways or not and if not why when I read these stories and I was like no way no how that's far out ain't happening why what is it from is it from fear is it from shame what is tied into that bodily thing I also want to make a very important Point here to State what I hope is obvious but I want to be super careful so when I keep talking about vulnerability and this kind of thing we have to create we can only create certain kinds of safe spaces and what I'm not at all trying to um speak on behalf of is creating unsafe vulnerable spaces is right so this is not something you just I just want to be clear about that and I think that's really important for pastors for all of us we don't want to ask people to come in and open themselves up or be vulnerable in spaces that where that trust has not been established and created and this again I'm back to kind of the challenge but the gift that I think pastors

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um can help give which is to create these kinds of communities in whatever ways we can create those because that's where transformation happens

Stan:

I like the part that we started with that you're doing some interdisciplinary studies because right now in leadership and business leadership trust and vulnerability are two of the really key factors so there is a ton of resources out there for starting to figure out how do we develop trust and how do we begin to demonstrate vulnerability

Jaime:

yeah because your leadership thing reminded me and one thing think pastors can um model and we can on teachers as well um even though we're not really rewarded for this and this is counterintuitive uh but I I've been reading leadership books and I'm surprised um about the place of humility so something I see in the story of what Mary did and what Jesus both I mean Jesus is Jesus for crying out loud and yet chooses to get down on his knees down by these dirty feet really be involved in the real uh grit and grime of our lives but I've been surprised in these in I was reading a book called the new leadership literacies or something like this and the number of times the word humility came up really shocked me because I don't think we necessarily see that modeled super well right now in our culture the notion that a good leader is one who exhibits humility

Stan:

one of the things I talk about in one of my classes is that humility is the only unique Christian virtue in the ancient world it was not a virtue among the ancient world but humility is that uniquely Christian virtue when we lose that whether it's a pastor whether it's a business leader who is a deacon in the church when we lose that humility then we are adopting virtues that may or may not be of the world right but they are not of God and the humility I mean that's what Philippians is all about that's what Incarnation is about so living living this humility of My Life as a taking on flesh experiencing my fleshiness I think is a crucial crucial aspect for this

Jaime:

and I think even the way that the gospel ends you know with the story of Peter you know that's a whole another and I know you have a whole another episode on that but you know what is it that when you see kind of the commission of the disciples I mean what are they called to

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what kind of leadership I mean first of all picturing Peter speaking of vulnerability oh my gosh you know that scene I just I can barely honestly I can barely sit through it um it's so awkward I mean if you imagine all the disciples sitting around you know that movie The Gospel of John I always show this scene when I teach that there's that movie The Gospel of John by visual Bible entertainment or whatever and it's so they come in close on the face and you know Jesus asks him do you love me the first time and then a second time you know and then a third time you just see the tears go down and I'm just could you imagine like I mean that's um that's no joke uh that's the kind of the Gospel is imagining this kind of spiritual this kind of relationship with Jesus and God where we are fully fully seen no matter what we've said what we've done where we've been what kind of leadership is Peter then called into the kind that Mary exhibited in 12 Jesus exhibited in 13 that is feed my sheep Mary it's in the context of a meal bodily needs are being met being fed bodies tended to emotions shared and processed um and then at the very end you see it again so 12 13 then you see it again on the beach with the fish the feeding the empowering and yet again the call into humble leadership of feeding right three times feed my Lambs feed my sheep so it's a pattern and this is why today I wanted to focus on 12 and 13 as the Crux because because things are moving towards it and then going from it we end on those same themes that's what you and I think partially love about the Gospel of John if you didn't get it the first time keep on reading but you have to read in order you have to read in order and you have to read from the beginning all the way to the end otherwise you just you can get some of it but not all of it one of the reasons I should say I love the Gospel of John I don't know if you have this experience

Stan:

it's amazing to me I because I teach this all the time and people say I love the Gospel of John and I say why it it's really interesting because even though I know it's incredibly complicated gospel that you can devote your entire life to and we're going to be dead and gone both of us before we scratch the surface of of just the um inexhaustible meaning of this gospel we both love so much on the other hand it is so inviting and I think it's because the individual encounters the number of people who have told me they really kind of became a Christian or really gave their life to Jesus however you want to put it right became part of the Christian tradition because of their encounter with this particular gospel and so this gospel truly has it

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all um so I do hope that the people who you know are listening and thinking about 12 and 13 today can take away you know some sense of what would it be like how are we currently doing Christian discipleship Christian Community Christian transformation and are we including emotions and the body in the whole s instead of just teaching people things and also getting people teaching people just virtues to live by which are all great and I'm a huge fan but are we able to bring our whole bodies including all of our emotions knowing that our emotions are going to be Here There and Everywhere is it all welcome

Stan:

and I mean that's the Deuteronomy passage if we can't bring our whole self to love God how are we going to actually follow the teaching of Jesus because he says that as well as he repeats that it's the wholeness of us and I think especially we're in a generation um where there is a lot of transition happening and a stale Christian practice is no longer Hasty and it doesn't have any Aroma but the the people are not wanting staleness they're wanting flavor

Jaime:

but yeah I just think the Gospel of John definitely has something new in there to be discovered as you said for this day because like I said I only turned to this because I'm typically I'm an academic like you so we're normally like people want to know things about and they just want to explore this Greek word and that Greek word and I love that but what can our scriptures like how can they be a site of drawing us into where we really feel filled up and and physically tied to God you know to Christ um yeah and I think that's going against the grain I mean this is the gospel I mean it's only this gospel right it's like unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood that's pretty darn embodied that is in you know our colleague has that whole book on ingesting Jesus you know I mean what is it eating Jesus and then it says he lost a lot of disciples for talking like that you know yeah no that's that's pretty uh Stark yes it is embodiment Stan:

well thank you for the time that we've had together to talk about the Gospel of John and appreciate you agreeing to do this

Jaime:

yeah well I'm really honored to be part of it I love your work on the Gospel of John and I love this podcast so keep up the good work

Stan:

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well we will try to do so thank you for listening to conversations in the Gospel of John our next guest will be Alan Culpepper Alan has made a tremendous impact on Johannine studies during his career if you'd like to email us any comments you can do so at cgj@stanharstine.com bye now