

This morning I'd like to talk a little about Facebook. I bet there isn't one of us in the congregation this morning who hasn't at least heard of Facebook. Some of us have got profiles and are constantly connecting with friends – long time and new. Some of us have kids who are on Facebook. Some of us have seen or heard about someone's kids on Facebook. Is there anyone here who has never heard of Facebook? Who here this morning has an account on Facebook? How many check it once a day or more? Once a week? How many opened an account and forgot about it?

For those of you who do not know what it is, or what the heck the movie the Social Network was all about, or what any of this has to do with the story about the woman at the well, I want you to remember what it was like for you to be in high school. Some of us didn't discover what I'm about to talk about until college or university, but most of us have been in high school. Go back to those days in your memory right now.

Do you remember having a group of friends; not just a favourite friend, but a group of friends? They were your pack, your tribe, your social network. Some of them were in the same classes, some of them were in the same young peoples' group, some were on the same curling leagues, baseball teams, or glee club. Do you remember that everyone wore the same kinds of clothes...and you always checked with your friends to make sure that the clothes you bought fit in with everyone else's? There were always variations of the same hairdo or brush cut.

Do you remember talking with your friends about the opposite sex, and about whether you would go to the sock hop, or the box social or church picnic depending on whether the girl or boy of your dreams would be there – or not. Do you remember meeting at the movie theatre together, or the A&W, or the skating rink where everybody in your pack went? And do you remember that not only was there your tribe, your pack, but there were also other tribes and other packs, other social networks. Some groups were mortal enemies of each other. Some were more cool than others. Sometimes you were in more than one social network because your friends at school weren't necessarily your friends at church or on the soccer team. Always, though, you knew where your pack fit in the social order.

And do you remember how sometimes on one day some one person was in your pack, but within a day or two they were not, and how that was. Some kids got bullied because of it.

Do you remember how you did everything to make sure you didn't fall from grace and get ostracized by your pack? No one wanted to be the subject of anyone else's gossip. Everybody moved together, everyone dressed in a similar way...no one dared to stand out. Am I describing the social network of high school and university dorms accurately?

Facebook is all of that, only it's all on computer...thanks to the magic of the internet. Let me show you my account. (show them my account) Facebook is just as lovely and friendly and welcoming as any real social network can be...the difference is that you control who is in yours. But it can be equally dangerous, damaging and hurtful. Because gossip still exists, and mean spirited messages get bandied about. And if you become ostracized, it's often forever.

The Social Network – one of the movies nominated for best picture at the academy awards this year – is all about the development of Facebook. At first glance, this movie seems to be about intellectual property...who owns it, who has the right to develop someone else's idea and the cost of selling out on your friends. The idea of Facebook started when Mark Zuckerberg, a computer technology student at Harvard, got angry with a girl he wanted to date and wrote about her on the internet. He was angry and drunk and he wrote stupid things that became available for public consumption within seconds of it being posted on his blog. Zuckerberg discovered the power behind the complete and permanent accessibility of the internet.

Zuckerberg then hears of a new internet social network idea, for university students at Harvard, proposed by two Olympic athletes. Zuckerberg decides he can build a better application, a faster way to access it and a much more interesting, very cool look. He recruits his only friend Eduardo Saverin as co-founder mainly because of Eduardo's business background and initial \$1000 investment. But Saverin falls from grace when the founder of the music website Napster (which incidentally has completely changed the way music is consumed) and convinces Zuckerberg he can make billions for the emerging Facebook corporation, in a way that Saverin can not. Essentially, Zuckerberg swindles Saverin.

When the website finally goes viral, with 1,000,000 members on line, with billions of dollars to be made, the lawsuits start to fly. Saverin sues Zuckerberg for defrauding him of his rightful share. The Olympic Athletes sue both Saverin and Zuckerberg for stealing the original idea. And the audience is caught in a time dance between the deposition hearings when the lawyers lay out the way the lawsuits will go, and the heady days when Zuckerberg went nuts to create this website.

I mentioned that at first glance this movie seems to be about the ownership of intellectual property, until we see Zuckerberg at the end of the day of deposition hearings, alone at the board table with no one and nothing but his computer. The irony is that the girl he once trashed on his internet blog, has a profile on Facebook and he actually thinks about inviting her to be one of his friends. Zuckerberg ends up the youngest billionaire in the world, even after paying out millions of dollars in damages to the Olympic athletes, an undisclosed amount to his former partner Saverin, and yet he is completely alone. With all his billions, he still doesn't have the girl he wanted in the first place.

Switch gears with me. There are at least three reasons why Jesus should have ignored the woman at the well. She was a Samaritan. Jews hated Samaritans in the first century and that was reason enough. She was a woman, alone in a public place. Women in first century Palestine were chattel property of men - their fathers or their husbands - they would never have been alone in the first place and it would have been unthinkable for a Jewish man to talk to a lone woman in a public place. We find out within minutes that this woman has been married five times and is currently living common law with husband number six. Now before we get to judgment here, we can't assume this woman has been divorced five times, she may have been widowed. It's the gospel writer's way of telling a story...exaggeration. Hyperbole and metaphor.

How Jesus knows that this woman has been married so many times is anyone's guess. But think about how this story might have played out on Facebook. The outcome for the woman would have been brutally the same....complete separation from herself and her community. No woman in her right mind comes to the well to fetch water at mid day. It's too hot for starters. And when women only get to see each other publicly at times and places like this, it's clear this woman doesn't want to be with the other women. With five husbands and a common law later, think of the gossip. Easier and safer to come at mid day when no one is around.

This time, the woman meets a guy who has this annoying habit of breaking down all social barriers. I'm convinced his Facebook account would be wide open to everyone. He has an uncanny ability to read people's eyes, and their body language. He quotes scripture that flies in the face of the dominance of empire, really upsetting the temple leaders who are cosy with the Roman overseers and he seems to empower people to take responsibility for their own lives. Jesus' disciples have watched him do this every time they turn around. And so when they see him doing the unthinkable, talking to a lone woman in a public place, they're shocked but they don't say anything. It's what this guy does.

What's really interesting, in relation to the movie, is that the woman's experience of this complete change in societal norms actually empowers her to reclaim the intellectual property she has been spewing her whole life. She says to him: "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). It becomes her own when she claims it for her own. The message she brings about healing and grace, restores her place in the community. She goes back to the people who have shunned her, alive in herself. And even though it's a flawed testimony - "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" - she makes it.

As I think about the times in our lives when we feel most alone – Zuckerberg, with all his billions, is most alone – where do we get a healing word from the Messiah who is coming? Where does Zuckerberg find a healing word that helps him reclaim himself and reconnect with his community? Where do we find the same healing word? You know I went to Zuckerberg's own account on Facebook; it's actually pretty open. And you can read what people are saying in the wake of this movie. Do you know, most of it is encouraging and quite loving, at least the stuff I read. Basically, the people are asking "what did you learn? Thank you for this genius community called Facebook. It is really cool. Can I be your friend?" There's the Messiah...right there.

Now isn't that a call for the church? To be a place that says welcome to people who are cut off from themselves and their communities; to be a community that invites people to think: what did you learn; to be a community that says thank you for your gifts to the world. And finally a community that asks, can we be your friend? Now there's a social network. Amen.