So before the birth of our first child, my wife and I did all the things you are told to do as newly expecting parents. I should note that these things only applied to our first born because after that, you just do what you do with the next ones. But we read books about parenting, we double- and triple-checked to make sure we had everything ready months in advance, and we attended a birthing class. In our minds, we were well prepared and there wasn't much that was going to catch us off guard… But it turns out that even for all of the books and preparation and classes you take, there will always be something that you didn't expect. For me, I spent a lot of my time worried about postpartum for my wife. I mean, postpartum is given a huge emphasis in the labor and delivery department – and for good reason. So I was on the look out for any signs of postpartum and I was ready to make sure we nipped that in the bud before it got too bad.

However, it wasn't my wife that needed the attention. It was me. Despite the overwhelming joy and excitement I felt at being a new dad, I couldn't shake that there was also a deep and growing sadness. But it didn't make any sense to me – what reason could I have had to feel sad? It wasn't until one night, when the tear were flowing that my amazing wife told me I should seek out some help to figure out what was going on. And it was then that I learned about the thing no one told me about, no book or class prepared me for, and what is by and large mostly unspoken about: paternal postpartum. It turns out that there is a kind of emotional impact that the pregnancy and parenthood can have on the father, as well. Long story short, I got the support I needed and was able to get back to a place of loving being a new dad.

The unnamed Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John carries a water jug. But I think John wants us to see that she carries more than just a canister for one of life's most basic needs. It's not just a jug. It's everything about the situation that leads her to haul the jug back to the well each and every day. It's the fact that she fetches water at noon – the hottest part of the day – when no one else gets water then. It's that she seemingly is well aware of what others are thinking or even saying about her and her past – and maybe she has even begun to believe some of it herself. It's the weight of being a Samaritan and a woman who culturally has no business being in the vicinity of Jesus, let alone speaking with him. She carries a jug for water, but that's just what we see. What we cannot see is that she carries so much more.

You see, everyone is carrying something that we have no idea about. Everyone carries something that we cannot see or know or understand because we've been conditioned to put on a strong face and make sure it looks like we're doing fine, even if we're not fine. It's why German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer urged his community to "regard others less in light of what they do or omit to do, and more in light of what they suffer." In other words, we should value empathy over our insatiable desire for judgement.

I think it's important to note that not once in the entire interaction with the woman does Jesus condemn her or tell her to repent or offer her forgiveness. In short, this is not a judgment conversation. Instead, it is an encounter filled with compassion and grace and love – the things we should always hold at the forefront of what we know about God through Jesus. Jesus understands that there is more to the story than a woman gathering water. She's someone who carries hurt and pain of a past unknown to us; she carries the stigma, sideways glances, and hushed whispers of her community who don't know the whole story; she carries the weight of vulnerability and disappointment and helplessness. Until she didn't have to carry those things anymore.

Did you notice that tiny little detail? That small breadcrumb that tells us everything is different now? It says, "She left her water jar and went back to the city." She left, what by all outward appearances, was the very reason for coming to the well at all. Because it was never just a jug for water. It was so much more than that. And through Christ, she was liberated from the things she carried. "He has told me everything I have ever done" she said. I suspect what she really means is that someone finally gets her. Someone sees her. Someone recognized the burden she carried – and was able to do something about it.

My friends in Christ, everyone is carrying something that we have no idea about – something we cannot see, something we cannot understand. But what if it's true? What if there really is a God who sees us, who knows us, and understands the things we hide from everyone else? And what if this God, out of deep, incomprehensible love for us, could not bear the thought of you having to shoulder that burden alone? And so this God took on flesh and came to be with us – but not just to be with us but to speak the word we've been longing to hear: leave it all behind. Leave it at the well. Let go of the things you carry. For your pain and struggle and brokenness are seen and known; the hurtful assumptions of others are not who you are; the burdens you bear, the weight you shoulder, the things you carry are not yours to carry anymore. For Christ has taken all these things and so much more upon himself and upon the cross, so that we could be truly free, so that we could be filled with the breath of life, so that we could know beyond all doubts, we are loved beyond measure. Thanks be to God! Amen.