

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Lent 3A

Sunday 15th March 2020

Living Water – Trusting in lasting hope

Give me a drink.

I think if Jesus had asked this question today – it would be give me some toilet paper, some pasta or some hand-wash!

We hear this story today at a time when we are all anxious and uncertain about what is happening with the Corona Virus.

We hear this story at a time of need.

This story starts at a point of need. Here is Jesus' need – tired and thirsty in the middle of the day in a foreign land.

So begins the longest conversation that Jesus has in the gospels with anyone and what a conversation it is.

It is a conversation that crosses all the boundaries – which the woman seeks to highlight – she's a woman and a Samaritan.

Not meant to talk to women and especially one of those people. And here she is, someone excluded coming for water in the hottest part of the day.

Samaritans were seen as impure, they worshipped in the wrong place. They are the black sheep in the family as they stayed in Israel during the exile and intermarried and changed how they worshipped.

Right from the beginning Jesus chooses to enter into a conversation and in that encounter is the gift of life, of transformation.

Jesus turns the tables from his thirst, to the offer of the gift of living water.

He talks of the gift of water that is something deeper that becomes in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

This is a rich quality of life starting now.

Give me this water she says

Jesus then tells her that he knows her – in the truth of having five husbands and then tells her who he is.

As Barbara Brown Taylor says:

By telling the woman who she is, Jesus shows her who he is. By confirming her true identity, he reveals his own, and that is how it still happens. The Messiah is the one in whose presence you know who you really are—the good and bad of it, the all of it, the hope in it. The Messiah is the one who shows you who you are by showing you who he is —who crosses all boundaries, breaks all rules, drops all disguises—speaking to you like someone you have known all your life, bubbling up in your life like a well that needs no dipper, so that you go back to face people you thought you could never face again, speaking to them as boldly as he spoke to you. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done.”

Jesus is the one who offers her acceptance and inclusion where there are no barriers. So she goes from being ostracised to being a witness to others in her city with her tentative questions. Yet this is enough.

This is a story rich in symbolism and meaning, of transformation, of a gift offered, of growing trust and faith in a simple conversation.

Jesus offers an unlikely person the gift of truth about themselves and the offer of living water.

I wonder what it is we thirst for now?

What is our deepest need?

How does speak in the night-time of our fear and the world's fear around us?

It is so easy at the moment to feed our fears and panic buy and want to buy up the whole supermarket.

It is so easy to be focussed on what I need rather than what others in our community need.

I think what is important in this time of uncertainty is to trust in the love of our God who is with us, who offers us the deep waters of peace and strength and love to sustain us and can be relied on.

How do we drink deep of the living waters in these times, how do we plunge our jugs into the fountain of water that is ever-flowing?

To me what is most important in these days is to pray, to sit with God and to be in the present moment, to slow down and take deep breaths and remain as calm and thoughtful as I can.

It is to know that I am deeply loved by God and that nothing can take that away.

It is to drink at the well of the scriptures each day and listen to these ancient wise words that bubble up freshly to speak to us now.

It is to say the prayers that are the bedrock of our faith – like the Lord's prayer - and to share what comforts us with others.

It is to reach out to others with loving compassion. Has your neighbour got enough toilet paper? Is there someone who is frail or vulnerable that could do with a hand with shopping, or with getting what they need?

Can we share?

As we draw on God's love and strength we can find hope, knowing with Paul that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope and that hope does not disappoint because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Our deepest thirst is for acceptance and love, hope and trust in something greater than ourselves. This is what the Samaritan woman finds and shares with others.

This is also God's call to us, to be as calm as we can, to look out for one another and care for those around us, in particular the vulnerable and frail.

How can we as a community of faith share the living water of loving compassion with others?

How can we be compassionate, and kind and generous?

How do we become living water that flows through us.

We may not be able to touch each other physically but we can touch each other with loving words and care.

A poem I came across written in response to the pandemic I've found helpful:

Pandemic

*What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?*

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

*Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.*

*Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.*

Center down.

*And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.*

*Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)*

*Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.*

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

*Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.*

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

*Lectios:
Exodus 17.1-7
psalm 95
Romans 5.1-11
John 4.5-42*