

Traditional Home service Sunday 12th March

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Lord Jesus Christ, we confess we have failed you as did your first disciples. We ask for your mercy and your help.

Our selfishness betrays you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We fail to share the pain of your suffering:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We run away from those who abuse you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We are afraid of being known to belong to you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord: and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*The King of love my Shepherd is*)

READINGS - Exodus 17.1-7
Romans 5.1-11
John 4.5-42

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*Jesus, joy of our desiring*)

CONCLUSION

May the Father from whom every family in earth and heaven receives its name strengthen you with his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us always.
Amen.

Hymns to use

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth:
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

1 Jesus, joy of our desiring,
holy wisdom, love most bright;
drawn by thee, our souls aspiring
soar to uncreated light.

Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
with the fire of life impassioned,
striving still to truth unknown,
soaring, dying round thy throne.

2 Through the way where hope is
guiding,
hark, what peaceful music rings;
where the flock, in thee confiding,
drink of joy from deathless springs.
Theirs is beauty's fairest pleasure;
theirs is wisdom's holiest treasure.
Thou dost ever lead thine own
in the love of joys unknown.

Sermon - JOHN 4:5-42
JESUS & THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

I wonder if you have ever experienced what you expected would be a perfectly ordinary day in your life, but then something happens that transformed (in a good way) it into an extraordinary day? Perhaps you've been surprised by an unexpected gift, it could be the moment you receive some life-changing news, maybe winning some kind of competition, or having a clear moment of revelation or epiphany...something that has changed your ordinary day into something extraordinary. Moments that have transformed us in some way and become part of our stories. My example...

Our gospel reading for today – the story of Jesus encountering the woman at the well – is an example of an ordinary day being transformed into something extraordinary. While the woman in the story isn't given a name, she is a significant character in John's gospel. This woman was going about her ordinary daily duties, going to get some water from the well, and something happens to her in this midst of this very normal activity that transforms her day and the rest of her life – she meets Jesus. This moment becomes an important part of her story – a story that she shares, and through which others also come to meet Jesus.

We don't have lots of information about the woman at the well, but we do know she was a Samaritan. In Jesus's time, relationships between Jews and Samaritans were not good – they did not want to mix, and were particularly keen to avoid eating or drinking together. So, three things are significant here: firstly, that Jesus chooses to travel to Galilee on a route that takes him through Samaria, secondly, that Jesus initiates a conversation with this Samaritan woman, and thirdly that he asks her for something to drink. This was a situation most Jewish men would have avoided at all costs. But as we know, Jesus is not just any ordinary man.

For those of us that were here last week, hopefully you can remember we were looking at John 3, including the well-known verse 3:16...God so loved the WORLD – Jesus came for all people. And here in this

encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman we start to see

God's mission for all people put into action. God's love, demonstrated through Jesus, is not restricted by race, class, or gender. God's love supersedes all social boundaries and rules.

Even the woman is shocked by Jesus's interaction with her, as she reminds him "you're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman...how can you ask me for a drink?" We shouldn't be mixing... And then, although Jesus first asked her to give him a drink, he reveals that it's actually her that should be asking him for one. But Jesus is talking about a different kind of water – Jesus isn't simply offering the woman drinking water. Jesus is offering her living water – a gift from God that is available to all who ask for it.

This living water that Jesus offers is totally different to what the woman has been surviving on so far. It will be so much better than whatever else she has been using to quench her thirst up until now. It is a water that cleanses and satisfies. Water that brings hope and healing. Water that completely washes away old ways of being and bring eternal life. It is only Jesus who can offer these things, and in offering her this living water, Jesus offers the woman new life with him. Later on in John's gospel we learn that this living water Jesus is offering is the gift of the Holy Spirit, that comes and dwells within those who believe.

The living water that Jesus offers is available to all of us – none of us are excluded from the invitation to receive it. As Jesus said, it is a gift from God – it is given and not earned, it is granted by God's grace to all who ask for it. We're saved by grace, not by anything that we do. Just as it was for the woman at the well, what Jesus offers us is so much better than anything we can provide for ourselves. I think we can all be guilty at times of trying to do things our own way or by ourselves. And I think most of us carry within us some sense of longing – whether it's longing for love, happiness, acceptance, fulfilment... whatever it might be. We know that there are all kinds of ways we can try and satisfy those longings for ourselves. But our own methods of seeking satisfaction will often just lead us in

to pain and harm, and ultimately, we never actually end up feeling satisfied. Jesus is the only one who

can truly satisfy the longings in our hearts – and allowing him to do so will only ever be for our good, and never for our harm.

The life that Jesus offers through the gift of his Spirit, the living water, is so much better than whatever else we might be trying to survive on. I wonder if there's something we're perhaps trying to survive on in our lives at the moment that just isn't doing the trick? Do we need to hear again Jesus's invitation to ask for the living waters that he offers? For me, even though I know that I've received the gift of the Holy Spirit and I know that I'm never without it, I still find it helpful to ask for Jesus to fill me afresh each new day. This helps me to give over the things I might be struggling with and recognise the areas in my life that I'm trying to fix or satisfy on my own. It's part of me learning to put my trust in God and choosing to let what Jesus has for us to be what satisfies and sustains me. I know I need to be reminded of this regularly! Because just as we all need actual drinking water to survive, we all need the living water that Jesus offers us.

Let's return to the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well... Although she hasn't quite grasped the reality of Jesus's words, the woman asks Jesus to give her the living waters he has told her about. And what follows is this dialogue about the woman's previous husbands and current living situation. We're not given any details about the woman's previous marriages, why they ended, or how she's ended up in her current relationship. And it's important to remember that this was a society where women had little agency and did not have the power to choose to divorce their husbands etc. That doesn't mean she is a woman without sin or responsibility – she's obviously a human being! And the fact that she has had so many husbands has possibly made her something of an outsider in her community. But I think it's unhelpful for us to put too much focus on speculating details about the woman's life that John didn't feel necessary to include in his gospel. And in fact, if we do that, I think we miss the point of what's really going on in this situation:

Jesus has initiated a conversation with an unlikely woman in the midst of an ordinary task and is seeking to reveal to her who he really is. So far, the woman has not fully understood what he is really saying, but Jesus doesn't give up there. Jesus wants to help her understand, so he uses words of knowledge about her personal life to move her to the next level of understanding who he is. Jesus's words aren't judgemental or condemning. Yes, they're challenging and to the point, but there is also compassion within the challenge. Jesus sees her mess but also accepts her, and still continues to pursue this encounter with her. The woman might not understand him, but Jesus sees and understands her.

Jesus's words about the woman's personal life are not intended to condemn, but to reveal and confirm who Jesus really is. And it works – the Samaritan woman can see now that Jesus is some kind of prophet. The Samaritan woman's understanding of Jesus is shifting.

With her growing understanding of who Jesus is, the woman begins to challenge him, raising the question of the proper worship – something that the Samaritans and Jews would argue over – where the true 'holy mountain' and right place to worship God was located. In the Bible, mountains are often significant places where God chooses to reveal his presence to his people. But as Jesus's answer reveals, God's presence is no longer restricted to holy mountains or even temples. The Spirit of the true and living God isn't contained or limited by location or architecture. And as Jesus emphasises, true worship is no longer about our physical location, but about the orientation of our hearts – the kind of worshippers that God desires are those who worship in spirit and in truth. Without really knowing it, this Samaritan woman has never been closer to the presence of God – she is standing before the true revelation of God in Jesus.

As we've journeyed through this story, we have seen the Samaritan woman's understanding of who Jesus is shifting bit by bit, as she begins to grasp his true identity more and more. And here after this talk about proper worship, the penny is about to

drop. I wonder if the woman was trying to end or move the conversation on, but after Jesus explains what true

stories so that we point others to him. Let's pray...

worship will look like, she essentially says to him, 'I've heard that one day someone, a Messiah, will come and will explain everything to us, so let's not worry about all this now...' And in a few short words, Jesus reveals that he is in fact the one that she is talking about. 'I am he' – the true Messiah, the one the world has been waiting for.

After the big reveal of Jesus's true identity, we're told that the woman leaves her water jar behind and rushes back into the town to share what has been revealed to her. I love how quick the woman is to share her testimony – 'Come, see the man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?' She becomes the first evangelist to the Samaritan people – she gets there even before the disciples did! Her simple testimony of the Jesus who has revealed himself to her, in the midst of the ordinary, draws many people from the town to come and meet Jesus for themselves. Then they too come to see that Jesus is the saviour of the world.

What an amazing story! Through her conversation with Jesus, we have seen this Samaritan woman moving slowly from unbelief to belief, from darkness to light, from misunderstanding to understanding. Jesus has journeyed with her as she has been transformed from an outsider to a witness and evangelist. An ordinary day turned into one that was extraordinary and became an important part of her story, a story that God then uses to play a small but important role in his mission to love and save the whole world.

And that's not just the story of the Samaritan woman. That can be and is our story too – God is at work in our lives, revealing himself to us so that we grow deeper in our understanding of who he is. But also, to give us stories of our encounters with him that we can share with those in our community, so that they too can be encouraged to come to know the saviour of the world. As so we finish, I'd love to pray for us as we try to live this out, that God would continue to reveal himself to us, and empower us to share our