

**Sermon 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

**Lent 3**

**By Joy Dipple**

**Readings: Exodus 17:1-7**

**John 4:5-42**

Moses needed the patience of a saint, and this wasn't for the first time either. The Israelites were behaving like petulant children – “I want water and I want it now!” They constantly grumbled to Moses and Aaron, and Moses knew even God's patience was being stretched. Moses cried out to the Lord: “What am I to do with these people?!”

Surely God was never going to deny his people the water they really needed to sustain their physical needs? That is something I've considered on previous occasions when I have read this passage. But maybe God just wanted them to trust Him, and to ask Him nicely instead of just moaning to Moses instead.

We too are God's people, and unfortunately we are also inclined to moan when things don't go the way we want. We are always in need of God's mercy.

When we look at people who could be described as saintly they have a really Christlike quality about them. They exude peace and wisdom. However, I suspect that those saints wouldn't see that about themselves. Perhaps, more than most, they are only too aware of their own sinfulness and struggles, and how bad their old lives used to be, even if other people can see Christ in them.

The woman at the well would probably have been perceived as immoral, and probably saw herself in that way too. She certainly was very honest with Jesus about the fact that the man she was now living with was not her husband.

Interestingly I wondered if the woman at the well was ever classed as a saint, and when I googled it I found out that in Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions she is venerated as a saint with the name Photine, or Photina, meaning ‘the luminous one’, and became a martyr under Nero who reputedly had her thrown down a well. How true that is I don't know, but the story was interesting.

Jesus so often defied convention. His disciples were aghast that He was talking to a woman, and a Samaritan one at that. Travelling through Samaria was not their choice. As we know, there was a lot of hostility between Jews and Samaritans. The fact that Jesus had also asked her for a drink was also taboo. There was no way that a Jew would have wanted to be seen sharing drinking vessels with a Samaritan.

When I was in Israel I did have a drink from Jacob's well. It really is deep – to the depth of about 138 feet, and our guide had a struggle to turn the amount of rope needed to draw the water. Of course the well is no longer outside but under an orthodox church.

To be honest I sometimes wish Jesus didn't talk in riddles, but He needed to inform the woman of an eternal world beyond the physical, a world of spiritual living water to which He held the key.

Samaritan beliefs didn't extend to the full breadth of Jewish scripture, but Jesus had aroused her curiosity and she certainly knew about the expectation of a Messiah. There was a dispute about the geographical locations of their holy mountains, their holy sites; and Jesus informs the woman that a time would come when those disputes would be irrelevant. God's people would worship Him in spirit and in truth. Jesus was also very open with her in stating that He was indeed the Messiah.

His honesty and His insight into the woman's life was enough for her to run off and call the people from her town of Sychar to come and consider for themselves whether this man really was the Messiah. As a result many Samaritans came to believe in Him. Away from His own territory there seemed to be a greater openness for people to accept who Jesus really was.

Jesus spoke to his disciples about the fields being ready for spiritual harvesting sooner than expected, and right at that moment the Samaritan woman was in the process of evangelising her town.

Maybe, just maybe, our own world is becoming more open to the truth of Christianity. The harvest time is already here, even though it is only spring.

When we consider the very real concerns over the coronavirus, it has caused people to become unsettled. Our normal lives aren't quite so safe. What has been a concern in other countries is now too close to home for

comfort. It raises questions about where we find our security, and that doesn't just mean whether we've got enough loo paper!

We are also in a society where people get fixated on promoting their own agendas, some of which are very commendable, and some of which are just annoying.

People need something on which to focus their attention, but unless they find Christ, pandemics and agendas remain a huge source for anxiety.

We have a beautiful message – that God is indeed in charge and longs for us to trust Him. Yes it is a struggle. It was a struggle for the Israelites in Moses' day, and it is a big struggle for us now, but to see the world in the light of eternity restores greater balance with all our other concerns.

Ultimately, our greatest need is the living water of Christ.