

Year A Lent 3 8th March 2026

Exodus 17: 1-7. Romans 5:1-11. John 4: 5-42

Living Water

This morning I want to focus on Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, not any old well, but the well Jacob dug. Jacob, whom God named Israel. A well 75 feet deep, that had been in existence for near on two thousand years, and yet it was still providing water to all who came thirsty. In the original Greek, the word for spring was more commonly understood as 'source'.

Jesus sat thirsty beside the source of his own – Jewish – religion. Jesus understood that he was the source of the Spirit and the eternal flow of God's love for all humankind.

Jesus was at Jacob's well at the sixth hour, in other words, at noon, in the heat of the day. In four weeks' time we will also encounter Jesus at the sixth hour, but this time being crucified.

A Samaritan woman approaches to draw water. Jesus – with the gift of insight of the human condition – sees something in her. He knows that she could also become a source of the Spirit for others. A woman, no less! A Samaritan, no less!

Jesus knows the best way to deeply engage with someone is to ask for their help. And Jesus was thirsty. There commences a dialogue between them, which includes two 'if' statements:

- ✚ If you knew the free gift of God
- ✚ If you knew who it is saying to you, 'give me to drink'

The free gift of God – God’s grace, justice and mercy flow to those who love God. Does the woman know what free gift she is being offered? She is intrigued but doesn’t know, of course.

If you knew who was saying... - can she come to understand that Jesus is the bearer of the free gift, so that she too may receive it, and she may become a source of the Spirit herself.

Jesus has faith in this woman, and is inviting her to trust him and have faith, to express her needs as Jesus had expressed his need for water. For her to desire living water. The Greek word here is *Zon*, from which we get words like Zoology, the science of living things. The water Jesus gives is alive with a new quality of life.

The woman understands him to mean flowing water, quite naturally. She has no insight just now into what Jesus is really meaning, but asks if he is greater than his ancestor Jacob. We note that the woman is starting to get a sense that there is a different level to this conversation and she is struggling to gain its meaning.

Jesus responds that drinking water from the well will satisfy her thirst for only a while. But, whoever drinks the water Jesus gives them will never thirst, in the Greek it reads, ‘into the new age’. The water Jesus offers is of himself, his body, mind and spirit, animated by the Holy Spirit. When we have received this living water, whatever Jesus thirsts for, we will also thirst for. This ‘living water’ isn’t wet, made of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom bound together, (H₂O), but the essence of Jesus’ being, that can flow from him to her.

Maybe one way of understanding this is for each of us to recall and reflect on the impact a teacher or positive role model has had on us; someone we admire and trusted who knew us and how to get the best out of us, maybe knew our potential better than we did.

Someone who has indelibly managed to get us to be a truer version of ourselves than perhaps we knew at the time?

So, it was with the Samaritan woman. Jesus offered that his truth would come alive in her. That truth was the Spirit of God that Jesus could grant her, so she too could live with and out from that Spirit of God. This the free gift Jesus mentioned to her. She only had to ask and it would be given to her.

This is the free gift each of us can receive from Jesus, that the Holy Spirit could spring forth from each one of us, so we too could be a source of the truth and love of God, and be able to share it with others we meet at our version of the well at noon.

Where is your version of the well?

- ✝ A bus stop and bus journey?
- ✝ In the Knot or other place of volunteering?
- ✝ Whilst walking?
- ✝ Whilst playing golf, bridge, dominoes, tiddly-winks, cluedo, dungeons and dragons , etc?
- ✝ Whilst singing in a choir?
- ✝ Whilst socialising with friends, in a book club, etc?

The woman has been transformed by her encounter with Jesus. Her whole outlook has changed. God's truth has already been at work in her.

In this encounter, the transformation is complete when the woman, newly blessed and flooded with the Holy Spirit, is able to get the whole village to come and see Jesus and then for them all in the village to invite him to stay with them for two more days.

And so it was, that on the third day, he returned to Cana in Galilee.

When God's Holy Spirit does its work in us, we too can be transformed. One of the signs is that our ego no longer drives our thoughts and deeds, instead we understand and see the truth of God's kingdom and its values, and seek to let them flow from us.

Have you in prayer, in a time of quiet, asked for this gift from Jesus? How might we, as a faith community, individually and jointly, facilitate time at Jacob's well, so we can be nourished by the living water?

And, as it is living water, flowing freely, it is not something to be dammed up. It is meant to flow, to nourish and quench the thirst of others. How might we go and share it with others?