



## *Have we asked God for His Living Water?*

Many many years ago when I worked for Samaritans, the welfare arm of our Diocese, I was managing a Service for People with Intellectual Disability; we had just moved the residents into group homes, and the hostel, their previous accommodation, which was opposite All Saints' church at Singleton was being used as our office.

The old hostel, St Elizabeths, was a huge rambling building and the section we were given had no water supply, so to make tea and wash up, I would have to go to the "well"!!, an outside tank and "draw water" into a jug. As I stood in the shade of a huge old tree waiting for my jug to fill, I would smile to myself and consider myself the Samaritan woman at the well drawing water, I sometimes think Jesus was there with me in the shade of the tree.

This Gospel reading today has several cultural aspects that give us a greater understanding of Jesus' message. Firstly, it was a strange hour, noon, for a woman, alone, to be out in public at the well. The women would usually gather together either early or late in the day to avoid the heat. When Jesus asks the woman for a drink, he crosses two social barriers of that culture, a gender barrier, because he is a lone male, requesting a favour of a lone woman, (the disciples had gone to the town to purchase food). And also an ethnic barrier because Jesus is a Jew; this goes against the customary stand off between Jews and Samaritans. The disciples were astonished when they returned. The woman remarks "How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

The woman appears to treat the meeting with contempt, of course she has no idea who the Jew is and she feels that he speaks out of turn by asking her the favour, for a drink of water. So this meeting at the well becomes a "wooing" of the Samaritan people through this Samaritan woman at the well. This meeting begins on a low, as regards the woman's attitude toward Jesus. Jesus' response to her turns the whole exchange around, so it is actually the woman who is thirsty and Jesus has the water of life to quench her thirst.

As always Jesus used common examples, such as water, sheep, shepherds etc, to explain his teachings. The people could relate to these things and were able to eventually understand as they grew spiritually.

This brings to mind the Gospel reading last week, when Jesus says,

"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asks. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born." Jesus answers, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they're born of water and the Spirit."

We are able to understand the meaning of the words because we have received spiritual growth.

So back to the well; water is possibly the most important thing in our physical life, without it we can't survive. Our bodies are made up of between 50 - 60% water. All plants and animals need water to survive and so too with our spiritual being, we need the water of life, a thirst for God and for the life with God that all human beings were created to share. The "living water" that quenches that thirst and leads us to that life is the Spirit, a gift that Jesus will give without measure. At this point Jesus is offering a promise, the reality has to wait until his mission is completed, in particular his death upon the cross.

The woman is still looking at physical water and does not yet understand the spiritual water of life, at the symbolic level. Therefore she needs to explore her own personal situation more profoundly. Jesus asks her to go and fetch her husband, she says she has no husband, which is true as she has had five husbands and this one is not her husband.

These verses are not meant to expose moral guilt, but to uncover the pain in her human relationships and this pain is perhaps a symbol of the deeper "thirst" that Jesus is attempting to uncover, a longing for life that only the experience of intimacy with the Divine can give.

Jesus' mysterious knowledge of the woman's private life prompts her to conclude that Jesus must be a prophet and she mentions the issue of hot contention between her people and the Jews, especially regarding the proper place for worship. Jesus explains that a coming worship of the Father will completely transcend locations, people will be free to worship everywhere.

The Samaritans had a very limited knowledge of God as they only had access to the five Books of Moses. Jesus continues to explain that the hour is coming and indeed now is, when those who worship as God wants, will do so in Spirit and in truth. This is a huge revelation for this woman to grasp, to try to understand, however her faith journey has begun and she says to her Samaritan townsfolk; "come and see a man who has told me all I have ever done, can this one be the Christ?".

The townsfolk pour out of the city to meet Jesus, they ask Jesus to stay with them, so he does stay two days during which time many people believe in him and begin their faith journey and many more Samaritans come to believe because of Jesus' words. The woman provided a great testimony, a very powerful introduction to Jesus, however the people came to believe through Jesus' teachings, not just her testimony.

And so it is the same for us, we are introduced to Jesus; it's much easier for us today as we have the complete Bible, we have leaders and theological scholars to help us discern Jesus' message, we have each other to study the Bible with and share our interpretations. We have access to a lot of information that assists us on our journey. A journey that continues until the end of our life, there are always challenges and mysteries along the road, sometimes rough ground to cover, and often lush green pastures to rest in.

I attended a retreat at the Monastery at Stroud a couple of years ago, has anyone been there?, and as I was walking through the bush, I found a large bush stick, it is strong and stable, just like Jesus, the stick supports and keeps me steady over rough ground and up steep hills. I can also brush away cobwebs and shoo away snakes and wild animals, not that I saw any at Stroud, only 6 or 7 curious wallabies.

So do you have a Jesus stick?, a constant reminder of the love and power of Jesus in our lives? It can take many forms, a Bible, a prayer book, prayer, Bible study. I do like symbols, the story of the rock!! ...

It can also be sharing time with family and friends, gazing at nature, God's amazing creation. Anything that draws us to Jesus and causes us to reflect on his majesty and power, his love and forgiveness and his promise of eternal life for all people.

Amen