

Living Water ...

... Rivers of Living Water

A sermon given on the Third Sunday of Lent, 12th March 2023 – by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

John 4:5-42

I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel weary: weary of the same old routine; sometimes I feel weary because of the demands and expectations that seem so endless and relentless and never get any the less; sometimes I get weary of all the questions I can't answer and the problems I can't fix; but sometimes I get weary just of this world we live in and its sheer brokenness; weary of the endless stories of casual racism or different kinds of abuse suffered by so many; weary of people continually trolling each other on social media; weary of politicians blaming refugees and asylum seekers for their own misery - I have to say I'm with Gary Lineker on this one - when your life is at risk, when your relatives have been murdered, when your political party has been banned and all you're trying to do is find somewhere safe and you're so desperate you're willing to risk your life on an overcrowded boat on the open seas. How can it be right to be treated as a criminal, as an invader, as some kind of scourge that's just to be got rid of? How can that be right? How can that be Christian? How can that even be human? I get weary of the shameless injustice, and sometimes beastliness of the human race. And I have the luxury of privilege; in no way am I a victim, but sometimes I still get so weary of it all.

And in our gospel reading this morning, we meet a woman who is tired: tired of the drudgery of having to come outside the village and fetch water every day; tired of being judged by everyone else because of her irregular private life; tired of having to come out to the well at midday in the heat of the day to avoid all the hostile stares, the wagging tongues, the disapproving body language; tired of being shunned, excluded, isolated and with no hope of it ever ending. This woman is weary. And the well, which should be a source of life and refreshment, is for her, a symbol of disappointment and frustration and drudgery.

And maybe there are some of you here this morning who are also feeling weary. Maybe you're tired for the same sort of reasons that I've outlined, or maybe you're tired because of something completely different: perhaps you once had a relationship that promised so much life, that became a source of pain; or maybe you had a dream that filled you with hope, that became a dead weight; or you had a venture that should have brought new possibilities to birth and ended up making you feel trapped; so many things that tie your hands, shut down your options and drain your energy and fill you with weariness.

But here's the thing. When Jesus meets the woman at the well, he's tired, too. This woman toiling out to the well doesn't have a monopoly on weariness. Jesus can give her a good run for her money. We think she's the one in need of refreshment. But he's the one who says, "Give me a drink." It seems a bit like going to the GP and outlining your symptoms and all she says is, "You think you've got problems? Look what I've got." Jesus meets our weariness with his own. That's the point of contact. As the woman says, "Sir, you have no buckets, and the well is deep." Might that be how you feel at the moment? If there is any water somewhere to quench your thirst and revive you, you don't know where it is or how to reach it. And yet it's at the well, where we have no bucket that we meet the Lord Jesus Christ in his weariness and thirst. He's tired too, and he's thirsty. And the other place in John's gospel where Jesus says, "I thirst" is on the cross at exactly the same time of day, about noon: it's on the cross that human emptiness and need is met by God; it's at the foot of the cross that we acknowledge our helplessness and need of forgiveness and grace and renewal; it's at the cross that we discover that the place of thirst can become the place of living water gushing up to eternal life; and it's at the deep well without a bucket, that Jesus promises living water to this woman. And as a result, there's a movement from stagnant pool to living water; from deathly thirst to endless fountain; from thirsting saviour at the well - and on the cross - to the risen Lord pouring out his life-giving Holy Spirit upon those who call upon his name.

And for the woman also, there is a movement, a transformation, as she puts down her empty water jar, the symbol of her weariness, and runs back into the city to tell everyone about Jesus. A movement from despair to hope; from cynicism and self-protection to trust and openness; from loneliness to inclusion; from self-hatred to a sense of self-worth. And perhaps for you and me this morning, there can also be a movement from weariness to strength; from emptiness to fullness; from drudgery to new purpose.

And notice that the promise of living water didn't remove from the woman the need to keep collecting water from the well. She would be back there again the following day, even after Jesus had gone. But the old task would have received a fresh purpose and energy. And so for us, receiving the living water of God's spirit won't save us from our daily tasks or responsibilities and probably won't make the world any less sinful. But it will give us new strength and purpose to face whatever it is needs to be faced. It will wash us clean so that we can see ourselves in the mirror of God's love. It will help us to redefine our tasks as offerings of worship and all we have to do is ask and he will give you living water. As the Lord promises later on in the same gospel, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

So come, drink and be satisfied.

Reading Text

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵ The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' ²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' ²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' ³² But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' ³³ So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' ³⁴ Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to

complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.' ³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'