

March 15, 2020

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning's readings about water cause me to stop and reflect on how important water is for life. The Old Testament reading this morning speaks of thirst and water and about a people willing to nag until they get what they wanted. The people used everything in their power to convince Moses that their request for water was valid and that God needed to provide that water. And it's almost as if Scripture came full circle with Jesus, God, actually giving this living water without being asked at all.

In the Old Testament, God grants the people's petition, breaking open the rock at Meribah and causing water to flow forth from it. Water to quench the thirst of an entire nation. But it doesn't take long for their memory to run short and soon enough like our woman from Samaria, they thirst again and find a new complaint to bring before God. They miss the connection and point of drinking the water God gives, the water which changes perceptions, worlds and lives. How much does the world need this water now?

Did you know that this reading from John's gospel about the Samaritan Woman always comes in Lent. Long ago it was set as a Lenten reading to secure the theme of repentance or turning, or returning to God. Something

the people at Merribah did not ever really do, and something the Samaritan woman did in a relatively short space of time. Our stories of water come together to illustrate how once we were blind to God's intervention of living water, and now that living water gushes forth , overflowing and soaking us to the core. But there is responsibility is receiving this water. The whole point of Christianity, is to pass it on, to hand over that faith and trust in God to those around us.

But we are often like the people of old, constantly complaining, constantly seeking more, never satisfied, never happy, always converting, wanting, or demanding.

Humans think they have the monopoly of suffering, on pain, on wanting their needs met above all others. Just look at how some people are responding to this health crisis. They are unilaterally deciding that their needs are greater than the person next to them. They are deciding that they are more deserving, more worthy, more needy, than the stranger in the aisle next to them. Its causing unusual and abhorrent behaviour. Its causing a rising panic which is much more contagious than any virus. Its causing irrational fear even in the face of evidence to the contrary. People are frightened and that fear heightens their own needs and suppresses the truth for whats right and fair for all. The people in the days of Moses, were the same. Their fear of no water right when they wanted or needed it, caused them to demand their fill

immediately. Moses says to God, 'this people are ready to stone me if they don't get a drink soon' of course God cedes to their demands and gives them that which they desire.

But how do we stop the crowd mentality? If Moses couldn't do it, how do we? When everyone else around you is crying for water, or toilet paper, whatever the need is, how do you not get caught up in the cycle of fear? What is Jesus teaching in today's lesson?

I think Jesus is saying, 'Stop! Forget where you've come from, forget who others believe you are, the only thing necessary is right here in front of you and to prove it, here is your fill of that which you desire'.

For generations men in the church have wanted us to believe that this story is not about the faith of a woman, but rather a lesson in morality, its most likely why its in Lent to teach us according to these men who decide. On first glance it does look a bit like that. Look how bad she is, it says, she's had five husbands and the one she has now is not even her husband. Look she's obviously ashamed because she's coming in the middle of the day to draw water, when knows she can be alone. Everyone knows that water is always drawn in the early morning or late afternoon and women never come alone to draw, its dangerous; theres safety in numbers, drawing water is a communal activity. So for this woman to be drawing alone and in the middle of the day,

must mean she is ashamed of who she is and the life she lives. And this at least is most probably true.

But why is she ashamed and why is it her fault? Did she decide that shame was her lot, or was from her community? Do you think she had a choice? Did her community forget that a woman with a dead husband or a deadbeat husband has no other choice but to accept the next mans judgment or perspective. Jesus knew this woman's heart to be good, he also knew but it had been hardened by the circumstance and fate of her life and the crowd mentality telling her who she was.

I wonder, did you know that this conversation with this alien woman is the longest recorded conversation in any of the gospels between Jesus and another person. Its important to not only note it, but have a think about what it means for us.

Over the years, church men have decided that this story is only about morality. They've decided it could be about nothing else because it contains a woman, therefore the only lesson it can teach is about morality and how to avoid or cure it. But Jesus is not offering a cure for morality, he's offering a way of life, a choice to live. In fact, thats exactly what he is offering, a choice.

Have you thought about the tone of this conversation. Sarcastically and boldly, she tells him what she thinks, she's got nothing to lose. He responds in a like manner initially by telling her about her life from the crowds perspective. Of course she is not surprised, men have been judging her wrongly her whole life. But then she makes some assumptions of her own. She believes he is only speaking of ordinary well water.

Jesus says, 'give me a drink'

She says 'what! Who do you think you are? You cant ask me for a drink, in fact you shouldn't speak to with me or indeed even see me.'

Jesus says, 'if only you knew who I am, you'd ask me for a drink instead'

You can just hear that sarcastic tone as she says 'well go on then, give me this water, so I don't have to keep coming to this infernal well every day in the heat'

He changes tack and says, 'well, go call your husband!'

She snips back at this point, so thoroughly annoyed, how dare he!

'Well I have no husband, so there!' she says

'Yes I know' he says, sarcasm over and using his softer tone, 'you have had many and the one you're stuck with now, wont even marry you and give you the benefit of a respectful life. By not marrying you, he makes you come here in the heat of the day to draw water. And you cant even be with your community because you don't have a choice do you?'

Whoa, she hears the compassion. She decides to trust him a little but pushes back.

‘Well then,’ she says, ‘if you know so much about me, just by looking, tell me who is this Messiah that is coming. I know the old stories, the living water can only come from God and you say one thing and we say another, so who’s right?’ She demands.

Jesus still speaking in a compassionate non judgmental tone says, ‘neither are right. Messiah is here now with you, I am he’. Looking her dead in the eye to make sure she understands.

The truth of his words, smack her hard, like a flat hand to the chest. She realises this truth like no other truth she’s ever heard, experienced or known and she cannot help but proclaim it. She realises the intimation of living water he has been speaking of. Now her little burgeoning, not yet fully formed faith, calls her to say something anything to anyone who will listen; she has to tell someone.

So she’s takes off, forgetting everything including the life saving water jar. She must get to her people and tell them of what she’s experienced; how Jesus knows her. She is an immature Christian, but a great one. She is a simple woman from a dubious background, yet she is one the quintessential disciples. She is true in her response and that truth shines through. They tell her, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe. Because of this encounter and her bravery, not only is her life saved, but she has instigated a whole community of souls which are saved. The crowd effect has worked in God’s favour instead of against it.

That's the real thrust of the story: Evangelism, telling and converting believers with the truth of God. And it all got started when she believed – and then she told someone else of her belief.

Her understanding may have been incomplete, her faith may have been young and not fully formed yet, but her faith caused her to ask the question “He can't be the Messiah, can he?” And then this question, becomes enough to hook people, to pique their curiosity, to invite them in to ask their own questions. Many Samaritans in that city believed in him because of her.

This woman, who is often remembered badly in church history for her less than attractive ethnicity, or her femininity, or her mortality, is the person who becomes one of the most credible witnesses to the gospel ever. When was the last time you talked with someone else about what you believe in? When was the last time you helped someone believe in the living water which sustains you?

It seems to me that perhaps that there was never a better time than now to do this. How can you reassure and be that living water for someone in your community that is fearful or isolated. How can you ask a simple question and then listen for the answer?

The encouragement to spread the Good News, to talk of faith and the wonders of God, permeates our scripture and rings out in our worship And

should carry over into our everyday lives even amidst the toilet paper
scrabble. This is what the gospel is calling us to, truly seeing God in our
midst. That Samaritan community suddenly saw this woman as more than the
sum of her circumstances, suddenly she was a child of God in their midst
sharing the gospel with them and receiving it in return. How will you share
God's water today?

Amen