

**Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's
Wimbledon, 19th March 2017, Lent 3.**

As I have said before God uses the most unlikely people to spread the Good news of the Kingdom of Heaven. In our reading from Exodus we have Moses, a reluctant leader coping with the rebellious Israelites, and in our Gospel reading a Samaritan woman who appeared to have had an unconventional background! Both the reading from Exodus and the Gospel of John are concerned with *'life giving'* water.

Firstly the Israelites complained to Moses that they had no fresh water to drink. They had been removed from their comfortable life in Egypt and were very disgruntled and rebellious. They did not want to listen to Moses. We all know how essential clean fresh water is to life and how without it we will die. This has been brought home to us in recent days and months as we see pictures of dying children in Africa, suffering as a result of failed rains, and lack of water for drinking or to irrigate crops. Yes water is essential to a healthy life

With the help of God Moses struck a rock at Horeb and water gushed out to relieve the Israelites of their suffering. I am sure that the people of the East African countries suffering so greatly from drought are praying for such a miracle. The miracle we need is that wars may cease; governments to govern responsibly, richer countries and individuals like you and me to respond to the emergency appeals that have been made. We have that opportunity here today to respond to the Disasters Emergency Appeal here at St. Mary's. If we are parched due to lack of water to drink then it is probably impossible to comprehend the life-giving water that Jesus speaks of in John's Gospel .

Secondly in our Gospel reading we heard about two people needing fresh water to drink; the Samaritan woman who came to the well in the heat of the day and Jesus. What a pity we do not know the name of this Samaritan woman? Jesus asked the woman to give him a drink as he waited for the return of the disciples who had gone into Sychar to buy food.

For Jesus, a Rabbi, to speak to a woman, and a Samaritan woman at that, was something that a respectable man would not do. To start with their conversation was rather confused as the woman was talking about giving Jesus a drink of water but Jesus was talking about a different type of *'living water'* . Jesus went on to explain to the Samaritan woman that *"...everyone who drinks of the water from the well will be thirsty again, but those who drink of water that he will give them will never be*

thirsty...” (John4:13) No wonder this woman was confused! We may be confused too as John’s Gospel can often sound convoluted and difficult to understand!

I'd like to tell you a story to explain the term "*living water*" or "*water of life*". When I worked for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Social Services Department there were a large number of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, children, or in the official jargon '*unaccompanied minors*', that had to be looked after by the Royal Borough. A closed children's home in Ealing was re- opened and staff with knowledge of Ethiopia and Eritrea were recruited. Ultimately teenagers were fostered with specially recruited and trained foster parents in an attempt to enable the young people to readjust to living in this country.

However one young woman said to the manager of the children's home that the water was not good. At first he thought that there was a problem with the water supply or the plumbing. But when he talked to the young woman in more detail he realised that it was the way of life in this country that she was referring to. In fact the "*water of life*", the very essence of how we lived and the life-giving power that gave us strength for each day, which is what she was concerned about.

This is the living water that Jesus referred to “...*The water that he will give to an individual will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life...*” (John 4:14)

Again the Samaritan woman misunderstood what Jesus was saying thinking that this '*supply*' of water would prevent her from having to come to the well each day. Then there was the unfolding of the Samaritan woman’s marital history of “...*five husbands*” and the man she now had was not her husband...’(John.4:17-18) Jesus could see into her very being but he was not condemning her. He transformed her life and she became a new person.

What a surprise too that Jesus revealed himself as the promised Messiah to this Samaritan woman who then becomes an ambassador for Christ. Not surprising really when we look ahead to the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day and the first person that Jesus appeared to in his resurrected body is a woman, Mary Magdalene. Yes God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform!.

To get back to the Samaritan woman. She returns to the city telling the people *“Come and see a man who told me everything that I have ever done. He cannot be the Messiah can he?”*. (John 4:29) This woman wanting desperately to believe that Jesus is the Christ the promised Messiah. This woman who was ashamed to come at a normal time to fetch water with the other women, in the cool of the morning, had come alone, in the heat of the day to the well, but had encountered Jesus, who had given her *“life-giving water.”* The Samaritan woman with her chequered history was renewed and refreshed and enabled to a new way of living by her encounter with Jesus.

We are renewed and refreshed by our encounter with Jesus and we too are called to believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

The people of Sychar, the Samaritan city, listened to the Samaritan woman and then came to see Jesus for themselves. He stayed with them for two days and we are told that many believed in Jesus. Jesus was not bound by normal conventions the fact that he a Jewish Rabbi was teaching Samaritans. We are told that the Samaritans believed, not because of what the woman said but that *“...they had heard for ourselves and we know this is truly the Saviour of the world...”*(Jhn.9:42).

This *‘living water, this life-giving power’*, from Jesus the Christ that the Samaritan woman received is available to each one of us today. We have to hear this message for ourselves to truly believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Every time we are present at the Eucharist and receive the bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ then we are renewed. But once we receive this life giving power we cannot just keep it to ourselves we have to share it with other people. It is rather like Love, love is something that we cannot keep to ourselves. Do you remember the words of Malvin Reynolds Song – *‘Magic Penny’*:

*“Love is something if you give it away,
Give it away, give it away.
Love is something if you give it away,
You end up having more.*

*It's just like a magic penny,
Hold it tight and you won't have any.
Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many
They'll roll all over the floor....”*

Let us all be bold this Lent, like the unnamed Samaritan woman, but remembered down the ages, and share the good news of this *life-giving water* of Jesus the Christ with others. Then we will truly know what it means to be a Disciple of Christ here in Wimbledon.

Amen.