

Prayer: God, you offer us the water of life. We turn to you in trust, knowing that your faithful provision can fulfill all our needs. May our gratitude propel us out to share the good news of new life with other thirsty people. Amen.

"Water for the Thirsty": God's gift and ours. We have two fantastic scriptural passages to explore and reflect on this Lenten Sunday about how 'water for the thirsty' is God's gift to us and for us to share. Remember in Lent we journey to Easter & the church has traditionally stressed that it is during this time we are called to do our own personal spiritual / moral / ethical accounting / auditing. It's not that we may not be challenged at other times, but we are significantly challenged during this time. If you think we are being 'got at' and the same kind of things are being preached – don't blame the messenger ☺, you are right – they are / we are.

It's this time of year – just as you will see in the newsletter, E-bulletin and hear later in our life together a reminder that our financial year is coming to a close and there are some things that need to be considered / managed / sorted with a part of the money side of our life. We are being asked to check that we have given financially to the church all that we believe God has asked us to for the past financial year, because our envelope 'donations' to the Church for 2013-2014 close off at the end of March and our tax rebates are calculated and given out.

What money we give to church has a direct, physical dimension and we know the church needs it to 'run'. Our yearly budget tells us how much we need to keep doing what we are currently doing. There is a second layer in the church about giving that's not about physical money. It has to do with why we give, how much we give and how much God is challenging us to give, all part of a bigger faith issue.

Lent is a time specifically of taking out the 'usual' of faith, having a good look and today because it is the close of the Tax year for donations – have a good look at the 'usual giving and reasons' and a chat to the Lord about what he thinks! A word of warning, the Lord might take you seriously and accept the challenge because one of the things Jesus was really, really good at was having a chat and turning a person's 'usual' upside down.

We had an example of this last week with Jesus and Nicodemus where Jesus talked about the need for us all to be part of a spiritual transformation process. When Jesus used the 'birth' process to describe it he turned Nicodemus's world upside down by challenging him to be born *again*. This week we have Jesus using the physical need for a drink of water to talk about our need to have the living water of God to satisfy our thirst, and turned a Samaritan woman's world around.

Like Nicodemus the week before, the woman from Samaria struggled to see the two layers- Jesus was teaching around; the physical – visible and the faith – the invisible of God. *Unlike* Nicodemus the woman from Samaria was transformed and recognised Jesus as the Messiah. Unlike Nicodemus the woman from Samaria shared, giving away what she had been given so that others came and drank for themselves and went away to tell others about the water being given by Jesus.

On the surface this is a pretty standard or even a usual story from the life of Jesus, and by digging deeper we can see just how extreme Jesus was in offering water for the thirsty. I saw three ways of opening this up by 3 sets of 'three'! 1/. Is the scene triplet! The three 'scenes' of dialogue: Jesus and the Woman from Samaria; Jesus and his disciples; Jesus, the woman and the 'others from Samaria. 2/. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is a triplet of discrimination: the Samaritan (racial), the woman (gender) and the sinner (moral). 3/. The third is the focus on the physical of Water, Worship and Food.

While I would love to explore all nine sub-themes, today we are restricted by our theme of 'water for the thirsty'. A constant need we have as people of this earth is for water. If you're ever stuck out in the wilderness, remember what survival experts call 'the Rule of Threes'. You can live 3 minutes without

air, though it's not recommended to try it! In a [harsh environment](#), it's snowing, say, you have 3 hours to survive without shelter. **After 3 days, you need water or you'll perish.** You can make it 3 weeks without food, though it's a given that it won't be fun. Of course there are always the exceptions, people have been known to survive 8 to 10 days without water. Corey Binns, \* <sup>2</sup> <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/> \*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.unwater.org/water-cooperation-2013/water-cooperation/facts-and-figures/en/>

Water is essential for our survival and when water is limited, or scarce and precious the lack of it quickly becomes a source of tension or reason for a fight. That's one reason why the Exodus passage is so significant in our faith history. The lack of water – let alone clean water to drink is a massive justice issue today. As this slide from a \*<sup>1</sup>UN Water web page says – 780 Million people **do not** have access to clean water and almost 2.5 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. This \*<sup>2</sup>slide is for the USA but shows graphically the need.

When the Hebrew people were in the desert, my slide is “The spot” where they installed the golden calf to worship, while Moses was up Mt Sinai with the Lord-God. As you can see, **water** was extremely important for life, not just for quenching thirst! What we hear is a lack of trust from the people that the God who called and protected them out of slavery in Egypt, **has fed** them manna along the way, **will continue** to provide for them. The quarrel with Moses enough to make him worried for his life and they test the Lord their God. With the staff that brought them protection and life on previous occasions – Moses (on divine orders) strikes a rock and water flows. Water is a power filled symbol of the life God pours out for his people.

Water is what the woman from Samaria was collecting when she met a Hebrew man sitting at Jacob's well, a clean, deep and historically significant source of water. There is so much in this encounter: why was she alone? Why was she on to her 6th 'man'? Lots of questions, few answers! She lives outside the 'usual' of her culture, ie walking alone to gather water in the middle of the day when the custom was for the women to do this in the cool of the morning, **together**. We assume she is shunned and cast out from and by her community with discrimination surrounding her on all sides. CV

Jesus opens the conversation and she responds readily enough. She begins her understanding on the physical level like Nicodemus from last week, when she demands Jesus give this water so she never again has to be thirsty, nor walk to the well! **Unlike** Nicodemus she sees further into the unknown of faith enough to ask 'Can this be the Christ?'

She is well versed in her history and knows the customary rivalry between her people and Jesus's. She knows that by talking to her Jesus is ignoring the five hundred year old hostility between their people. She engages in debating theology with Jesus about religious worship and the presence of the Living God. About how the Living God transcends the boundaries we would put around to contain and keep ownership of 'our' God. Worship is not bound to a physical place – this mountain or that – it **is bound to the relationship** between the living God and the person. Worship is not so much the *where* to worship but how to worship that Jesus is teaching her. The result is that she is so transformed by the conversation, by the gift of living water that she shares the source with everyone she possibly can.

The third theme of this triplet was food (and harvest). The disciples are concerned that Jesus get something to eat, but Jesus is more concerned with doing the will of God. When was the last time you became so excited about what you were doing that you forgot to eat? Jesus expands on the food theme by pointing out the harvest of spiritually hungry and thirsty people around them. There was no need to wait between sowing and reaping – the harvest was already waiting. The Samaritan woman had begun.

Jesus has once again shifted from a physical / visible level to a faith level of understanding – food has become a metaphor for our task and mission – some sow and some reap together we do the work of God for the people of God. Each action counts, and it's not all resting on you or my shoulders, today we've been reminded– the saviour of the world has come and his name was Jesus! Jesus gives the gift from God of living water – our mission, our task, our food it to give it away, to give water for the thirsty of the world. Amen