

Sermon on Sunday 8 March

by Rev. Scott Martin

Gospel Reading: John 4. 5-26

Thirsting for the well of Life

I have something I need to confess! And as someone who tries to be a responsible parent when it comes to my children's phone viewing time, it involves being a hypocrite as well.

I have recently realised that I am becoming increasingly addicted to endless scrolling through social media; memes are beginning to have a somewhat disconcerting grip on my life.

It seems to be happening everywhere. I sit down with my favourite book on the train and casually check my phone. Before I know it, I'm half an hour into my journey and I'm still scrolling with my book lying next to me. Only the other night, I was in bed ready for lights out - an hour later, still scrolling, watching a

video of a man who wants to show the world how many chilli peppers he can eat within one minute! What's happening to me?

I am, of course, saying all of this slightly tongue in cheek, and this is not a sermon against the “evils” of the prosthetic limb extensions we call our phones! But on a slightly more serious note, I have become rather intrigued and fascinated by the potentially addictive power this can have over me. I say addictive, because there's certainly a need for a quick fix involved here; a boost, a dopamine shot, a response to a need that's been fabricated within me and a NEED FOR... well, I have absolutely no idea.

I catch myself off guard from time to time, scrolling, falling into an endless, spiralling well of promise, that's never fulfilled, but just produces a pointless need for more! A thirst that's never satisfied, like drinking a glass of salty water.

The themes of water, and wells and thirst, you'll have noticed, are very much a part of today's Gospel

reading. The Gospel of John this morning recounts the biblical narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

We find Jesus travelling from Judea to Galilee and stopping at Jacob's well in the Samaritan city of Sychar around noon. Jesus' interaction with the woman was quite radical, because it broke several strict social norms of the time.

There was the ethnic barrier; Jews and Samaritans typically had "no dealings" with each other because of deep seated historical and religious animosity.

There was the issue of "gender"; Jewish men, especially Rabbis, didn't speak privately with a woman in public.

There was also, of course, the moral barrier; the woman was drawing water from a well alone at the hottest time of the day, which suggests she was something of a social outcast. Women in groups, would usually have drawn water from the well at the cooler

times of the day; morning or evening. The Samaritan woman was tolerating the heat of noon, to avoid being seen.

So, here we have the scene at the well, and Jesus continues to break through the barriers of moral and ethnic separation by saying to the woman, "Give me a drink".

This, of course, surprises the woman, because Jesus, a Jew, is asking a woman of Samaria for a drink. Jesus goes on to explain to 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**".

The woman doesn't fully grasp Jesus' message. She points out that he has no bucket and the well is very deep. Is he greater than their ancestor Jacob, who gave the well? Jesus explains that anyone who drinks from Jacob's well will become thirsty again. But everyone who drinks the water that Jesus gives will never be thirsty. The water he offers becomes a spring

from within, gushing up to eternal life. “Give me this water,” is the Samaritan woman’s reply, “so that I may never be thirsty, or have to keep coming here to draw water”.

The wonderful depiction of this story, in addition to being gathered around a well, also deals with a common human experience; that of **thirst**. The notion, or the idea of thirst, within a biblical context, is rich with potential imagery. With the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we are introduced to the idea of thirst at the most basic of human levels.

Who knows why the Samaritan woman is having to collect water at the hottest part of the day. Is she an outcast because of the number of husbands she’s had? Whatever the reason for being made an outcast, she is still a human being, with human needs, with a thirst that needs to be quenched, to be satisfied. And, it is at that most basic human level, regardless of her ethnicity or her social crime, that Jesus meets her as child of God. Not only does the Son of God meet her at the

level of basic human need, but he also shares with her his humanity by asking her for a drink.

What a wonderful image; God himself, in the life of Christ, breaks through the social, ethnic and gender boundaries, not with a God-like strength, but with a human need. He, like her, has thirst, just as he will go on to say, "I thirst," whilst nailed to the cross. In apparent human weakness, we see revealed the transforming and Life-giving strength of God.

Within the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman, there is also a beautiful liturgical element, a place of epiphany and worship. At the altar of the well, unbeknown to her, the woman brings the offering of water to God. The element of water, from the everyday needs of human beings, is taken and offered to God as a response to his invitation to commune with him. His response is only ever to return the gift as Living Water, a spring that wells up into eternal life.

In a short while, we will meet with Christ at the altar, and the gifts we bring to it, the bread and the wine, are

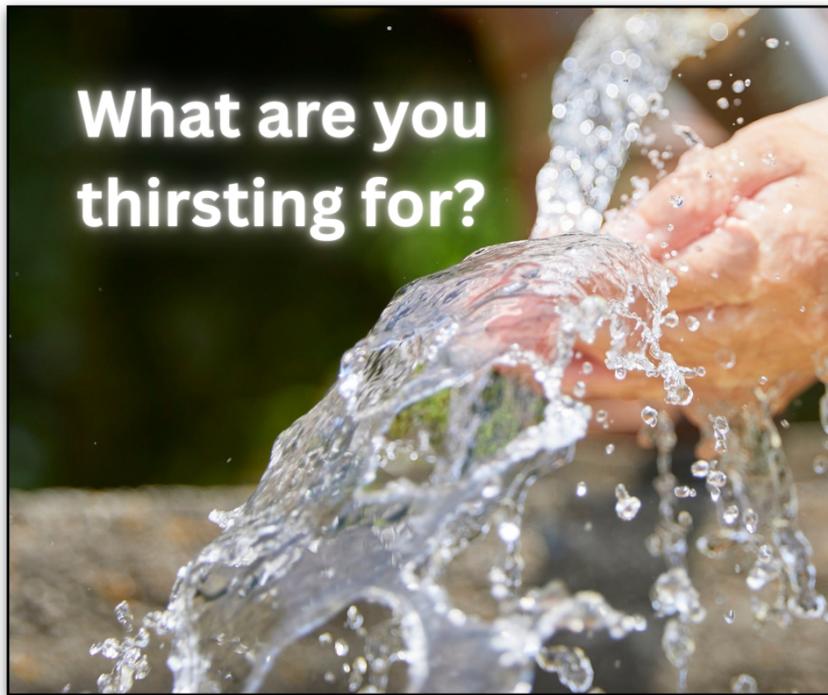
not lost to us and kept by him but returned to us as consecrated and transformed gifts.

The gifts of his body and his blood are an invitation to us, not to **snatch** Life from him, but to **receive it** by entering it; the Life that he has as the only begotten Son. The Life he will eventually offer back to his Father on the cross is not lost, but received back **for us**, when sin and death are conquered in and through the Resurrection of his body.

I began my sermon this morning by partly joking with you about my mindless spiralling down into the infinite wells of social media, trying to quench a visual thirst with unfulfilling memes that never really ask me why I thirst or what I'm looking for, but just go on fabricating a need within me for an unquestioned **more, more, more...**

It's not an entirely unfair observation to say that we seem to live in a world at the moment that has a real thirst. In an age that hallows raw choice as an end in itself, a world in which we move as empowered

individuals, navigating our way through a mechanistic life of data and algorithms, Christ still addresses us at the well, present with us here and now with the question, “What are you thirsting for?”



It's worth taking a moment to think about that question. Yes, we all have the need for things, for “stuff” to help keep life afloat, but in asking us about our thirst, Jesus isn't addressing the surface necessities of life that leave us thirsty again, he addresses the underlying currents of our souls.

In many ways he is asking us, “Where are you anchored ultimately? Where is your true source of life?” And, of course, when we are addressed with these questions, we stand with the Samaritan woman at the well, we accompany her in an unveiling of the moment, to reveal that it is in fact the Lord of Life who is engaging with us.

“If you **knew** the gift of God and who it is that is speaking to you,” says Jesus, you would come to understand that you are being offered Living Water.

Our Gospel story ended this morning with the Samaritan woman revealing to Jesus that she knows that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ), and when he comes, he will proclaim all things. Jesus’ response to this is embodied in those profound words, “I am He, the one who is speaking to you”.

And so, as we leave here today, we are invited to consider where our true source of Life is ultimately? Where is our true source of rest, of peace, that can never be taken away from us? There are many things

out there in the world, paraded before our eyes, tapping into our deepest hopes and desires, promising to quench our thirst... but for how long, and to what depths?

“I am He, the one who is speaking to you,” says Jesus. The one who drinks of the Living Water, that the Lord of Life offers, will never be thirsty again. Let us all, by God’s grace, make the response, and drink deeply from that well, for it is of eternity. Amen.