

Gospel Reading for Sunday 15th March 2020

John 4:5-42 - The Woman at the well



Today's Bible reading seems very simple. Jesus, tired and thirsty asks a woman coming to collect water from the village well, if she would give him a drink and, in return offers her "The water of life". But, as with so many of the accounts we read in the Bible, there is much more to this incident than we see on the surface.

Let's think about the woman first.

Why did she come along at midday—the hottest time of the day? The time when all sensible people would be sheltering somewhere cool.

The answer almost certainly lies in the fact that, as Jesus pointed out, she had been married five times and was now living with someone who wasn't her husband.

To get through that many husbands, the woman must have been either incredibly unlucky or morally inept. As in so many cases, the community would no doubt have assumed it was the latter, which meant that, in their eyes, she was definitely not the sort of person that "good upstanding members of the community" would want to associate with. We can only imagine the way that she would have been treated by her neighbours so it is little wonder that she chose to come out at a time when she was least likely to bump into any of them.

Hers' was not a happy state of affairs – indeed you couldn't really call it "life" – merely "existence". She undoubtedly craved all the things that most of us take for granted:

- Human company and conversation
- Non-judgemental acceptance
- An ability to offer help to others and for that help to be accepted (the need to be needed)
- Someone who was genuinely interested in her own well-being and didn't demand something back in return.
- Unconditional love

By behaving as he did, Jesus gave her all these things and so much more.

- Despite the fact that he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan – he remained at the well when she approached.
- Despite the fact that Jewish men were not meant to spend time on their own in the company of a woman – he didn't walk away when she arrived in front of him.
- Despite the fact that he would compromise Jewish purity laws by sharing a drinking vessel with the woman, he still asked her to give him some water.
- Despite the fact that she had a questionable past, he was prepared to spend time in conversation with her and to give her all that he had to offer – the water of life.

In short – we can see that Jesus was prepared to break down all the cultural and other barriers that stood in the way of him being able to develop a good relationship with the woman and in so doing, help her to experience true "life".

The woman undoubtedly showed a great deal of courage that day when she found herself in the presence of Jesus Christ. But as she left him and returned to the village, she would already have been feeling that this courage was well placed because now, rather than just "existing" she had started to "live". The "Messiah" had come into her life and showed that he wasn't just tolerating her company, but that he truly cared about her and wanted to develop a proper relationship with her. Indeed, Jesus made such a difference in her life that she couldn't stop herself from going back to her village and telling all her neighbours about the encounter – and they, recognising that difference, went straight to find Jesus so that they could have some of what he had to offer as well.

Jesus is waiting for all of us too, waiting with the same offer, the gift of the "living waters" that promise to give us life in all it's fulness on this earth and beyond.

He calls all of us to come into relationship with him and accept all he has to offer, then, having done so, to direct others to his side as well.

A Prayer of St Columba

Kindle in our hearts, O God,
The flame of love that never ceases,
That it may burn in us, giving light to others.
May we shine forever in your temple,
Set on fire with your eternal light,
Even your Son, Jesus Christ,
Our Saviour and Redeemer.
Amen