**#68 SG BCP Sunday 12 March 2023, Lent 3**

**Exodus 17: 1-7**

**17**From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2**The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ **3**But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?’ **4**So Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ **5**The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6**I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.’ Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7**He called the place Massah[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+17%3A+1-7&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-1991a)] and Meribah,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+17%3A+1-7&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-1991b)] because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’

**John 4: 5-42**

**5**So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6**Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

**7**A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. **8**(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9**The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%204:5-42&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26156a)] **10**Jesus answered 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.’ **11**The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12**Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ **13**Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14**but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ **15**The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’

**16**Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ **17**The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; **18**for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ **19**The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. **20**Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%204:5-42&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26167b)] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ **21**Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22**You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23**But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. **24**God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ **25**The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ **26**Jesus said to her, ‘I am he,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%204:5-42&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26173c)] the one who is speaking to you.’

**27**Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ **28**Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, **29**‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%204:5-42&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26176d)] can he?’ **30**They left the city and were on their way to him.

**31**Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ **32**But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ **33**So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ **34**Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. **35**Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest”? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. **36**The reaper is already receiving[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%204:5-42&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26183e)] wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. **37**For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.” **38**I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’

**39**Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ **40**So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. **41**And many more believed because of his word. **42**They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.’

I’ve long been fond of this Gospel reading.

Here we see Jesus, tired, sweaty, plopping down next to the Well; I imagine him stretching tired calves and hamstrings, stretching his back. I imagine him leaning forward, with his forearms on his knees, as he pauses his journey. We here see a meeting, occasional, unplanned, incidental, accidental, where Jesus is just being himself.

And, for once, he is static, and the world around him is static too; no throngs of people asking for something, no Pharisees trying to catch him out, no fishing to do, no healing to do, no justification of anything to do; it’s his down time. And its noon, the sun is overhead, and he’s parched.

He’s managed to shake the disciples off for a while too; they are all in the city buying food. Bless them, I suspect they sometimes created more work than they solved; they revert to their customary bafflement when they re-emerge later in our reading. ‘Best to keep them busy elsewhere if you really want a breather’, he thinks.

This is Jacob’s well; in Genesis 33 there is mention of Jacob’s land at Sychar, with no well mentioned then, but there’s a well there now. Its communal; water brings people together.

And then, for Jesus, a chance encounter; the woman might have come an hour before, or an hour after, and missed the Messiah. No doubt she has a physically challenging day, and it’s not over yet; on arrival the buckets are empty, she must lug them back full. So, minding her business and getting on with a menial but essential task, her life changes forever.

‘Give me a drink,’ he says.

The woman is an un-named Samaritan. Although about one in four Jewish women were called Mary or Miriam, with Salome being the next popular, we know next to nothing about Samaritan women’s names. But she knows that he’s not a Samaritan; perhaps he has a Galilean accent, perhaps he’s like a Geordie in Epsom, so to speak, or perhaps his clothes show him to be ‘not from round here.’ But what sparks her interest first is that he wants to share with her.

In doing this, he doesn’t conform to the world, and this nonconformity leads to transformation for the whole town of Sychar; of the whole world.

Scholars split John’s Gospel up into four parts; the opening is called ‘The Prologue’, naturally enough; then books 2-12 are known as ‘The Book of Signs’; books 13-20 are ‘The Book of Glory’; and then there’s an Epilogue. In ‘Signs’, scholars say Jesus shows 7 signs of his being different, from the Wedding at Cana – water into wine – to the raising of Lazarus in book 11. Other signs include feeding 5000 people, walking on water, and various healings. Although the number and nature of Jesus’s signs are contested, the conversation at the well isn’t usually taken to be a ‘sign.’

But, surely, it is?

It starts off as a private conversation, and its an important one; never mind Nicodemus and others, this is just about the longest two-way conversation in John’s Gospel. Jesus and the woman are freely conversing, Jesus, I suspect, with a twinkle in his eye as he sets up the ‘you have had five husbands’ gag, and the woman seeming comfortable in the presence of this unknown alien. Does she know that she shouldn’t be talking with him at all, that she should have silently given him the water and moved on? Perhaps this is the spark of life within her, a spark of similar nonconformity to that which Jesus offers, and *therefore* she is drawn to stay, and to him. She easily navigates the literal/metaphorical differences, as she moves easily from ‘how can you get to the water, you haven’t even got a bucket’ to accepting that he is ‘the water of life’. She’s bright; sparky, and up for a debate.

Women, it seems, traditionally drew water in the morning, away from the noonday heat, and it was a social occasion; our woman being here, alone at noon, might indicate that the was some sort of outcast. If its true, then its absolutely typical of Jesus’s discipleship to be with her there and then.

An outcast, then, and yet *he* asks for *her* help.

‘Give me a drink,’ he says.

We then hear his words, his generosity and his kindness give her the realisation that he is different; and, in her acceptance of his version of who he is, and her willingness to go and tell the whole town about it, I find both a deep longing for salvation and a portrait of a woman who is bold and bright enough to sieze the day. If only we knew we are in the ‘Good Old Days’ when we are actually in them. The woman realises that this is a defining point in her life, and that it’s happening right now.

At the end the end of the reading she is affirmed; ‘they’ believed because of what she had said, it was on *her* authority that they believed in *him*, only later hearing for themselves. So if she was ostracised, then she is so no more. Transformation indeed; *her* words now carry authority. That’s what a recognised, accepted, and acted upon encounter with Jesus does for you.

The story of the woman at the well is a wonderful example of love, truth, redemption, and acceptance. The Jews have been longing for water since Exodus, as we heard; now, here, the water of life has come for all of humanity.

‘Give me a drink’, *we* say; and we are ever, forever and always given the water of life, freely, and with love.

This is, truly, the Saviour of the world.

Amen