

## **Everyone is welcome**

As I read the Gospel passage, I am aware that many of us are familiar with the story of the Samaritan woman and probably as we hear it again today, we have a feeling of déjà vu, thinking we know what it's all about.

This feeling draws us to a simplistic view of the passage. But this morning, I want us to remind ourselves the words of the American author Mark Twain who said,

*“it's not those parts of the Bible that I cannot understand that bothers me, it is the parts that I do understand”.*

Therefore, let's look at the passage with a fresh pairs of eyes. From the passage, it is almost explicit that the water of life that Jesus gives, the water that leads to eternal life and it is the water of baptism. The Well could be seen of Jesus himself, the Samaritan woman might represents the foreigners and all non-Jewish people, and could be represented today by all those who are outside of the church, or those we see as unbelievers or “*unchurched*” as some would say. The disciples could be seen as the Jewish people who can be represented today by the church or Christians in general. The place by the well is a place of rest, where we allow ourselves to be met by God.

Many books have been written on this story, the best I have found in by Tony Horsfall, *Working from a place of rest*. I would suggest that if you have the time you read this book. I have copy I can lend anyone interested.

Out of the many possibilities of exploring this passage, I believe the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman perfectly mirrors the welcoming nature of God. It is on this that I want to lay emphasis this morning.

The woman in our reading, came alone to draw water from a well in the middle of the day. In a culture where fetching water is done collectively by women, either early morning or late evening, her coming alone says a lot about her social status.

She was a woman that has been excluded from many aspects of society. This is confirmed when she indicated her marital status. She has been married 5 times. In a society where divorce is a taboo, she has committed multiple taboos five times. It is no wonder that she was seen as a worthless woman to be seen with.

However, despite what many in her society would see as her sinfulness, she was neither rejected nor condemned by Jesus. He saw beyond the bravado and nature of her words. He saw her for who she was, a child of God who is longing to belong. It is in this is the same way that God sees each one of us.

*Instead she was encouraged and given the opportunity to be a part of the Kingdom of God. Instead of rejection she was accepted, from a position of exclusion she became an insider. Instead of disempowerment and shame, she was empowered and given the confidence to go tell other about Christ. From a position of worthlessness she became a valued member of the community.*

All these happen in what might seem to be a chance meeting with Christ; which in fact is not by chance at all. The Bible tells us that Jesus deliberately passed through the Samaritan village, when he could have done otherwise. He could also have knocked on the door of any house but he didn't. He waited by the well knowing fully well who will come at such a time of the day.

Brothers and sisters, whether you are visiting or you are a regular member of this congregation, being here today is not a coincidence. God wants you to hear that whatever your past, you are forgiven and accepted. You are not rejected, you are not worthless, you are not an outsider. Jesus wants you to know that you are special to Him. In Zachariah 2: 8, the Bible describes you *as the apple of God's eye*. God does not look at our past before he welcomes us. He welcomes us whoever we are, whatever we might have done. He says, He is yours if you want to be his.

I don't know about you, but I find this refreshing and reassuring. Refreshing in a society such as ours when it is easier to condemn and exclude rather than acceptance and inclusion.

I find this story reassuring because I know that whatever I might have done in the past, Jesus wholeheartedly accepts me and sees me as His Son, in whom He is well pleased. We can all enjoy the same experience as this Samaritan woman. All we have to do is drink from the water of life provided by Jesus and promise to obey and follow His commands. I don't know

where you are in your relationship with God, today is an opportunity to consider this.

This water of life is available through baptism. So today we are particularly joyful as we baptize Neve, Holly and Lynn and welcome them into the family of God. Their sins are forgiven and they are now insiders and members of the Kingdom of Christ. Nothing can now separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But their journeys of faith like that of us all, is not finished.

We now, like the Samaritan woman must go and tell those in our households, in our communities that we have met a man, who is able to save, give peace and direction and everything else we might need to make our lives worthwhile. My prayer is that like the Samaritan woman, many would come to believe and be saved because of our testimonies. Amen.