

# Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2023 – Lent 3

*(The readings in bold are the ones to be used for Morning Prayer)*

Readings: **Exodus 17:1-7**  
Romans 5:1-11

**Psalm 95**  
**John 4:5-42**

For those who live in a cities there can be a vague recognition that water is important but all people have to do is turn on a tap and there it is, in seeming endless supply: water that is safe to drink, and wash in. However, when you stay on rural properties in the West of Queensland; properties that primarily use rainwater tanks for drinking... then water is used frugally. Showers are short – the tap is not left on when cleaning teeth or shaving; toilets are flushed with bore water and clothes washed with bore water.

Beyond household needs, primary producers know that water is vital for the growth of crops and for sustaining of stock. Too much rain – as is currently impacting communities in north Queensland; rain at the wrong time - as happened in much South West grain harvesting towards the end of last year; or not enough rain... can each be catastrophic.

The Exodus reading this week gives an account of Moses leading the people of Israel in the wilderness, and they were complaining because they didn't have water to drink. They also didn't have water for their animals, and they looked back to their years in Egypt with nostalgia because they'd had water. We might be tempted to judge those complainers thinking that they could have been a little more stoic, and put up with the discomfort because God had freed them from slavery and was bringing them to a promised land..

If we are judging them we may not have experienced long years of drought. On the news we currently hear reports from an area often referred to as 'the Horn of Africa'. This is their fifth year of drought and the images from Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are particularly confronting. The United Nations suggest that this is the worst famine since the UN was created, with an estimated twenty-two million people now at risk of starvation. One journalist noted that all the toddlers and babies in some drought effected communities have starved to death already. It's hard to comprehend: all children under five in a community dead... their voices never to be heard again.

Bearing this in mind, let's consider that line from the reading a second time, '...the people said to Moses, "Give us water to drink."'

In today's Gospel Jesus is described travelling with his friends through Samaria. There was significant prejudice between Jews and Samaritans at that time which was well demonstrated in the public debate between two Jewish teachers. One suggested that if

you saw a Samaritan drowning and did not help then God would not judge you, while the other suggested that if you let them drown... God would condemn you!

Perhaps because of that prejudice and tension the disciples did not want Jesus to be polluted through contact with the Samaritans of Sychar. So, they went into the city to get supplies leaving Jesus safely outside.

However, while they were away a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water and, tellingly, she came in the middle of the day. Normally a woman would draw water in the cool of the early morning not in the heat of the day. We find out later in the story that this woman had had five husbands and was living with a sixth man so it's not unreasonable to assume that she was the object of gossip in her community. Perhaps, to avoid the gossip and unkindness, she came by herself in the middle of the day to draw water?

At that time, and in that culture, a Jewish man was not supposed to speak to a woman in public, even if she was his wife. This prejudice is still evident in a prayer which continues to be offered by Orthodox Jewish men in our time which says, '*... I thank you God that you did not make me a woman!*'

Bearing these things in mind we can acknowledge that it would have been expected for Jesus to not talk to this woman for she was a Samaritan; she was a woman; and her multiple relationships fell far short of what her religion demanded...

Jesus ignored these taboos and chose to reach out to begin a conversation. Astonished, the woman responded and what unfolded is the longest dialogue recorded in the Gospels between Jesus and another person.

They started with the safe stuff – the physical need for water on a hot day, but Jesus quickly took it to another level. He used the experience of physical thirst as a metaphor for the thirst we have as human beings to be known and loved. He assured the woman that though she'd been trying to satisfy that thirst in a series of broken relationships, it would only be through relationship with God that this longing could be satisfied. He said, '*... those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*' Then he admitted to this woman, whose name we are never told - that he was the Messiah – the promised one – the Christ.

The response of the woman was stunning. She left Jesus with the disciples and went back into the city, to the community who had shunned her, and said, '*Come and see a man... could he be the Messiah?*' Extraordinary that a woman is remembered in this role of proclaimer by a culture which valued men more highly than women. Extraordinary, also, that later in this same Gospel it was Mary Magdalene – another woman with a tarnished

reputation - who is remembered to have first met the risen Jesus, before being sent to the disciples affirming, *"I have seen the Lord."*

In this Lenten journey may we each drink regularly from the 'wells' of Christian faith and be reminded and renewed in the knowledge that we are deeply loved by the God who gives us life, and who knows everything about us. May we also have a renewed sense of identity and purpose to be children of God, called to bless and proclaim by the way we live our lives.

Would you please join me in prayer...

Generous God, we give thanks for the blessing of water, and for the way your Spirit satisfies our deepest longings for love, identity, and purpose. Like the woman at the well, help us to recognise you in the midst of our living, and make you known to those we share life with. We ask in the name of the one who said, 'I am he...' Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

*Possible focus questions for small group work or personal reflection:*

1. What are your deepest longings, and where does God fit in them?
2. What are the metaphorical 'wells' that you drink from?
3. What are the challenges for you to be more like the woman who invited her community to *'Come and see...'*?