

### **Reflection for Lent 3 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last**

*Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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."*

Water is something most of us in Scotland take for granted but stop and reflect for a moment on the vital part it plays in each of our lives. Our bodies are made up of something like 70% water. If we fail to drink and, as a result, become de-hydrated it is not long before we are in critical state if action is not taken.

Similarly, what of the need for water if plants are to grow either in our gardens or in the farmer's fields. Remove the source of water and very quickly that which is fertile becomes arid, dry and barren. Conversely, establish a good irrigation system and even the driest of deserts can blossom. This is the point being emphasised in our Old Testament reading from Exodus; as the Israelites travel through the wilderness they complain to Moses about the lack of water in such a harsh environment.

Think too of the problems we have in doing the simplest tasks like washing, cooking when for some reason Scottish Water turns off the water to our home even for a short while. Because of our abundance of rain, do we fully appreciate the true value of water, as compared with some other countries?

The image of water lies at the very heart of the conversation in our Gospel reading. Jesus, tired and thirsty from travelling, stops at Jacob's well and, when a Samaritan woman comes draw water, he asks for a drink.

Fair enough, we may think – but his very words *"Will you give me a drink?"* cut right across one of the very sharp ethnic divides of the day. Samaria was not a separate political area under Roman rule, but there had been for years a historical and religious divide between the Jewish people and the Samaritans, not unlike some of the divides that have led to civil conflicts in different parts of world over the years. Jews would not normally associate in any way with Samaritans - so much so that the Samaritans had had to set up their own worship centre at Mount Gerizim - a rival to Jerusalem.

Not only is this woman part of the Samaritan community she is also a woman of very questionable morality. Yet it is from her that Jesus requests a drink.

From the start of the conversation, the woman appears to be on her guard. But what comes through as the two talk is not the conflict between their two peoples but love. Jesus offers her water of a spiritual kind: water that will wash away so many of the barriers that currently exist, bringing with it new life and opening the path to eternal life.

Three important things strike me about this water that Jesus holds out.

Firstly, this spiritual water washes away that which divides. Jesus in his life and ministry so often does not operate within the barriers or norms of his day, rather he breaks them down, flagrantly crossing them. In last week's gospel he was talking with Nicodemus, that influential Jewish leader and Pharisee; today it is a Samaritan woman that the Jews would have placed at the very bottom of the pile. Yet what he offers to both is the same - the grace and love of God.

As he goes on to point out, *"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."* In the water that Christ offers, in the

waters of baptism, we are made one in Christ. “We are the body of Christ, in one spirit we where all baptised into one body.”

This is something that we as individuals and as a church need to remind ourselves of constantly, as we so often create and maintain human and unnecessary barriers. We are all one, we should live as one; the gospel message transcends and breaks down such divides of race, gender, social and ethnic groupings, in away nothing else can.

Secondly, this living water, like water used to irrigate a dessert or wilderness, has the power to bring life into places thought only to be barren dry and inhospitable. It has the power to make the dessert blossom and bring forth fruit.

As Jesus talks with that woman her past is brought into the open, and the mess that is her life. “I haven’t got a husband,” she answers. Jesus replies, “You are right when you say you haven’t got a husband. You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband.”

Yet what we see here is not condemnation but salvation - the water of life changing things and bring new hope. It is a reality that is infectious and the woman is compelled to go and bring others to Jesus. She is compelled to offer other the water of life. “The water that I will give will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water.” The reality is that we need day by day to drink of this water in prayer, scripture and worship, so that our own lives will be refreshed and washed clear. And, in turn, our attitudes will reflect those of Christ.

Thirdly, this water is not here today and them gone tomorrow; it is neither dependent on how much rain falls and is collected in one way or another, nor does it dry up. It is a stream of water that goes on for ever, providing not only strength to follow Christ today but also eternal life.

This divine spring begins for each of us at the water of baptism, as we receive the grace of God and are united with Christ. It is a spring we should look to drink from all through our lives and, as we do, we will grow closer to God and follow the example of Christ.

One religious order which lives out its life not in the seclusion of a monastery but in ordinary everyday life; talks about the 5 rhythms of grace. These rhythms are similar to this spring of spiritual water and I will close with them and allow you to ponder on them.

### **Rhythm One**

By God’s grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

### **Rhythm Two**

By God’s grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Rhythm Three**

By God’s grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.

### **Rhythm Four**

By God’s grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.

### **Rhythm Five**

By God’s grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God’s mission both locally and globally.