

St Marc, Grenoble

Sunday 12th March 2023 (Lent 3)

John 4: 1 - 42

Psalm 95: 1 - 7

'Living Water or Outrageous Love'

Good morning, and welcome everybody both here in church, and on Zoom.

Let's Pray.

Instead of my usual request for thoughts on today's reading, I'd like to ask one specific question: **'What is water used for??'** One word answers ... Thanks

Today's Gospel story could be called 'Outrageous Love'.

During His life on earth Jesus modelled love in many different situations and this story gives us an idea of the remarkable surprise, and often upset, caused by Jesus' actions ... and the response of some of the people who experienced them.

In our multi-ethnic, Western culture it's almost impossible for us to understand how much Jesus' behaviour challenged accepted cultural norms during His life on earth.

So many of the things Jesus did, and the ways He interacted with, and reacted to, people – often people your mother may not have wanted you to bring home to tea – were totally against not only His religious background, but the whole way of life, of the people He lived among. He often appeared to contradict much of the behaviour expected of a young Jewish man, quite apart from that expected of a rabbi.

In that culture, a man would never normally have allowed himself to be seen alone with a woman, and certainly would not have had a conversation with her.

To make things worse, this woman was a Samaritan; and Samaritans were the people Judeans historically loved to hate, and usually ignored. To share eating or drinking utensils with a Samaritan would render a Jewish person ceremonially unclean – and yet Jesus actually asked this woman for a drink, from her cup.

Thirdly, this woman was obviously not of unblemished character, even among her own people. The women of the town would usually come to draw water at a cooler time of day; in the morning or the evening – not around noon. The only reason for coming at this time would have been that she didn't wish to be seen by, or mix with the other women of the town; they would probably have shunned her - or worse.

From the discussion that he had with her, we know that Jesus was well aware of her story, and her very chequered history; and yet He was perfectly happy to engage in conversation with her. **Why did Jesus behave in this way??**

His conversation with this woman was remarkable – even outrageous – in various ways; quite apart from the fact He had chosen to speak to her at all.

First there was the, almost comic, discourse over the issue of water. Why did the Messiah need to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink anyway?

In reality, He didn't need to; but Jesus obviously wanted to reveal His identity to this woman – and the people she rushed to tell. Yet, He certainly didn't spell it out clearly – maybe He wanted them to work it out for themselves.

To continue the puzzle, Jesus offered her the gift of 'Living Water' - The promise of a gift like that really caught her attention for many reasons. The thought of not having to creep up and collect water everyday in the heat was potentially life changing. But, 'Hang on a minute, how could you do that? - You haven't even got a bucket!'

Then, Jesus' startling description of this living water; which once drunk would mean that you would never be thirsty again; and, indeed would provide you with a spring welling up inside you, bringing you eternal life.

'Yes please! Give me this water' ... she definitely wanted some of that. - And, to be clear, so do I - and so should each one of you!

This is Jesus' offer of His gift to each one of us - a 'life giving' spring of living water, welling up inside and bringing us to eternal life! ... Yes please!

This Samaritan woman quickly realised there is something very different about Jesus. She knew at once, from His knowledge about her own life, that Jesus was at very least a prophet. His prophetic nature shone out, and that alone captivated her.

Actually, I believe that when we finally get to meet Jesus, we'll all be captivated by His loving nature – and the amazing concern, care and compassion He has for us.

Jesus wants us all to know that He loves and cares for us; however inadequate, weak or sinful we may feel and despite whatever anyone else has to say.

Even now, that can be almost impossible for us to grasp – yet it is wonderfully true.

However impossible it may seem, whoever we are, whatever we've done, Jesus our Messiah, our redeemer – loves us, and wants to reassure us of His love and His forgiveness for us.

Also, this remarkable story confirms that Jesus doesn't mix only with 'good' people! - Where would He find them anyway? Our readings during the week told us we are all sinful from birth.

Whatever our life history, and ways in which we have totally messed up, Jesus continues to unconditionally love and care for us. He has come to save and redeem us (buy us back from the clutches of sin) and bring us the joy of His cleansing and healing power and His eternal life refreshing spring, which is able to transform our lives, if we invite Him in.

As the story continues, we see the remarkable effect Jesus' redemption of this woman had, not only on her, but on a whole community of people around her - starting with the disciples who couldn't understand, or believe, what was happening.

Jesus continued, teaching them that, wherever you are, there's an opportunity for a harvest by sharing the Gospel - the Good News of Jesus' love.

Next, the friends and acquaintances the woman had rushed to tell ... and ask 'Could this really be the Messiah??' they came to find Jesus and meet Him themselves.

We're told, some of the people in the town believed in Jesus because of what the woman told them. But even more came to find Him because of what she told them, and then they believed, because of what Jesus himself taught them.

Once we know we are redeemed, we can share our faith and we can invite people to 'come and see' for themselves.

Let's PRAY