

## Bennochy church: 12th June 2016

I wonder if you can remember a time when you were totally shocked at what you were seeing. You stop. Your breath is literally taken away. You rub your eyes. You look again and it is still true. You say to yourself, 'This can't be happening to me.' Your reality is shaken and you wonder what is going to happen next. How is this going to all work itself out?

*He is there. I have come to draw water and there shouldn't be any one else here. That is why I come to the well at the hottest time of the day. I don't want the stares of rejection. Those condescending looks. He looks Jewish. This is going to be awkward, but I need the water for my family. Here goes.*

Possible thoughts of the woman as she comes to the well. We have lost all the original tension of this encounter. This was no ordinary meeting. It is a story filled with meaning.

How did Jesus find himself in such a place. We have just celebrated and witnessed a baptism and that is where our story begins and in a sense, how it will end.

John tells us, Jesus did not actually baptise anyone himself. It was his disciples who did the baptising. I get the sense there was almost a competition going on, to see who could baptise the most; Jesus disciples or John the Baptist, who had baptised Jesus in the river Jordan. Anyway, the Pharisees, who were part of the religious establishment, were none too pleased about

what was happening, so Jesus had to leave and he decides to travel back to his home territory of Galilee.

Galilee is in the north of the country and the fastest route home was through Samaria, the ancient northern kingdom of Israel. The best way to describe the relationship between Jew and Samaritan is one of ancient animosity. They worshipped the same God, but there was no love lost between them. It was in effect, a sectarian relationship.

On his way through Samaria, Jesus stops at the ancient site of Jacobs well. Jacob was one of the ancient patriarchs of Israel and the well was a site holy to the Samaritans. The tension is racked up another notch.

The request for water is both simple and controversial. In a the heat of the day, a man asks for water. But, Jews saw Samaritan woman as unclean and certainly would not have used the same vessels as them to drink from. Jesus did not have his own jar to draw water. How unprepared of him! Yet, this is the deliberate act that sparks one of the most famous conversations in history.

In some circles, simply asking a lone woman for water was seen as flirting with them. Where you might have asked for a dance, here is the provocative, even sexual act, of asking a woman for water. Both Isaac and Jacob met their wives, not at a dance hall or at a party, but at a well! They were social places. The request

therefore set up, in some people's eyes, potential ambiguity that should have been avoided by Jesus! Not him!

The story then moves into a conversation where the meaning of water, is understood at two different levels. For the Samaritan woman it is all about the practicalities of not having the trauma or the embarrassment of having to draw water by herself, hiding from her village. They knew her lifestyle and rejected her for it. That is why she came to the well at noon to avoid people. No one else was stupid enough to do that. How good it would be not to have to do that ever again. She took Jesus words literally.

What she sought was magical. To never thirst again, and that is the point. She missed it and she got it. For Jesus, water takes on a whole new significance. If water is required for life, then he offers life giving water, beyond that which comes from the well. There are a lot of double meanings going on here. "Living water" was understood as fresh or flowing water that you could not get from a well. She is now confused. Who is this guy? No jar and now asks for water that is not there! Later on in the chapter, John identifies this living water as the spirit of God. God is spirit, and if lives are to be transformed, it will come by the spirit of God.

So here we have a conversation going on with two totally different interpretations of water. They kept missing each other.

The woman would eventually get it, but not yet. That comes later in the story.

The conversation does not get any easier. Jesus begins to challenge her understanding of the God she worships. 'Who does he think he is ?' She recognises him as a prophet when the truth of her relationships come out. That seems to be OK, but to challenge her holy places? That is another matter altogether. If she was originally fearful, she is now fair affronted.

She is clearly a woman of faith. She knows about the future promise of the Messiah. Then Jesus comes in with the big statement. *I am he*. Three small words, but what an impact! If the conversation had not been interrupted by the returning disciples! What did she say in response, we don't know, but the woman rushes off to tell her village about Jesus. Gone is the woman fearful and rejected, to tell of the man who knew everything about her life, and who still, in spite of her lifestyle, offered her new life.

It is a story about water. Her original purpose lost in a conversation, where the water of Jacobs well is replaced by the water of new life, offered by Jesus. This morning, we began with a baptism, the miracle and mystery of God in water. And now, we have listened into, overheard, a very special conversation, all about water. Jesus says, there is something far greater than the holy geography of special sites. It is the spirit of God. It is already here. It is to come. It is both present and future. It is a

promise offered by God. A spirit that allows us to enter into a new conversation, a new relationship with God. If baptism, is a sign that points to the presence of God. Then his Spirit, is the promise and the gift of new life. Amen.