



Third Sunday Lent 2005.

Exodus 17: 3-7 Romans 5: 1-8 John 4: 5-42.

Last week we reflected on change and three points emerged from the story. They were that closeness to God transforms us rather than any effort of our own; that a growing understanding of the Word of God will aid change; and that a listening heart will lead to active love of one another.

In this great story of the meeting of the Samaritan woman and Jesus we see these points given flesh. The meeting place of Jesus and the woman was a well. In scripture a well was an essential part of desert and near desert living. It signified life, the mystery of depths, a tribal marker, refreshment in fact like all symbols it supplies endless material for reflection. In the ancient scriptures some important marriages began at a well. Moses met Zipporah at a well. A bride was found for Issac at a well. Jacob first saw his beloved, Rachel, as she brought her flocks to be watered.

The story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus needs to be seen in this light. The image of the bride is used over and over in scripture to describe the relationship between God and humanity. The bride, as well as being the beloved, is also the companion and co-worker.

Jesus is not seeking a wife, but he is seeking someone with whom he can share God's vision. The vision of a world longing to reach its potential, a world that recognises that such a vision can be realised through responding to the graciousness of God.

As Jesus and the woman converse their relationship changes. They cease to be strangers. In the early well stories the brides were shepherds. The Samaritan woman comes to the well without a flock but leaves as shepherd of the kingdom.

The women of the Jewish stories found love and a partner with whom to begin a family. The Samaritan woman finds a new way of loving and the ability to be a spiritual mother and founder of a Christian community.

Jesus promises the woman the water of life. This water is the grace of God which fills her so completely that she too can become a fountain overflowing and bringing life to others. Through her wholehearted embracing of the Word she becomes an evangelist, a bearer of Good News to her kinsfolk. Later they were able to tell her that they had become disciples.

St. Paul, who was also a bearer of Good News, compares the love of God to water poured out upon us. As we swelter in the hot sun and watch the land crack, the grass wither and become a threadbare brown mat, the image of rain, or those great

arcs of spray watering the paddocks are powerful reminders of the renewing power of God's love. God's love as Paul says, which is freely given to all.

The gift of Jesus' fidelity to his mission is expressed through the virtue of endurance. This is in total contrast to the complaints of those brought out of Egypt by Moses. Instead of trusting the God who had freed them from slavery they complained about the lack of water, the lack of the familiar, the discomforts of travel.

Even the gift of water from the rock did not soften the hardness of their hearts. Paul says that the virtue of hope is the gift that, through Christ, keeps us going.

When people come to us seeking hope, let us be generous with the well of living water that we have received.

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