

Homily. 3rd Sunday of Lent. Year. A. 11/12 March 2023.

Here's the story. It's the middle of a hot summer's day in Israel. Two dusty, tired and thirsty people meet at a deep well. There is water in this well but it is a long way down and takes some effort to reach. These things the Samaritan woman and Jesus had in common. As for the rest, there couldn't be two more different people. Jesus was a respected man, a teacher and healer from the dominant Jewish culture in a patriarchal society. The Samaritan, was a woman with a background story of many husbands from a minority subculture.

Now, in those times Jews didn't talk to, let alone touch anything handled by Samaritans. Jesus started the conversation and in doing so he began blowing all of it to smithereens. He sat by the well and talked to the Samaritan woman asking her for a drink. She had the bucket and he didn't. In the ways of her time she thought that he wouldn't touch or drink from her bucket, but he let her know that he would. He then told her that if she realised who he was she would have asked him for a drink and he would have given her living water for free without expending any effort.

This idea of water for free with no effort appealed to her very much, but she couldn't yet get beyond all that separated them, all of those rules, traditions and experiences of difference and division. This led to talking about the big difference between them; who was right about where God is to be worshipped; On Mt. Zion in Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim in Samaria?

This division too, Jesus blew up! He declared that both are soon to be superseded. "The time is coming, it's almost here, when people will worship God in spirit and in truth, for God is Spirit and it's this worship that pleases

God. Various mountains and dividing lines between them and between people and cultures will be wiped out.” was what Jesus said. It’s the heart, the soul and spirit that matters, not a place on a map. In this way, by the well of Jacob, the new covenant of mercy and spirit was spoken.

Let’s leave aside the discussion about husbands the woman had. The point is that Jesus already knew about this and it wasn’t an issue for him. The message, which the woman gets, is that she’s been accepted with all of her faults and her sad history. She concludes that Jesus must be a Prophet of God. Her response is to go with this good news telling her friends and neighbours all about him and asking “I wonder if he is the Christ, God’s anointed and chosen one?” In the end the townsfolk ask him to stay with them for a few days sharing house and table and words of truth, all old divisions forgotten, with many coming to have faith.

Jesus and the woman did have one other thing in common that I didn’t mention earlier. They were both thirsty for a new and better way for humanity. He was overflowing with the hope and love of God that could make this happen and she was ready to drink it in. St. Paul told us that God’s hope and love has been poured like water into our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us through Christ’s death and resurrection. This is the pascal mystery; emptying out ends up filling us up with new and better things. It’s towards the celebration of and renewal in this great pascal truth at Easter that we are headed. Let’s keep on worshipping and living each day in the spirit and truth of God that heals and unites us all.