

SUNDAY 12th March 2023.

Week three of Lent – To Serve

Scripture: John 4:7-15 and 28-30 & 39-42.

We live in a culture where people are focused on the next best thing; the next best way to organize a closet; the next best item to buy. We seem to always be looking to the next thing. When someone upsets us, or they no longer fulfill our happiness, many just walk away, looking for the next relationship. But we never really settle as our lives are planned, priced out, and seeking perfection. Sadly, we do not even notice the aching question behind our search for the next best thing.

We desire fulfillment, rest, and joy but many are searching in the wrong place, person, or project. The only way we can be satisfied in what we desire, in what will fill the ache deep inside us, is by the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Our scripture starts in the Judean countryside. Jesus was on His way from Judea to Galilee. To travel this way people had to pass through the territory of Samaria. Most Jewish people avoided Samaria and travelled the long way round. But not Jesus – He seemed to delight in challenging the “norm.”

We will often look for the quickest route to get from A to B, rather than going the long way. We establish routines to increase our convenience and improve our efficiency. We resent interruptions to the way we worship those two gods – the god of convenience and the god of efficiency. We want convenience and efficiency in



our commute, work–life, home–life, and holidays. Isn't that why we use google maps? Show me the quickest and even cheapest way to get there – no tolls or traffic hold ups.

It is not unusual that Jesus took the quickest and shortest route when travelling to Galilee, even if it meant going through “enemy” territory.

Why was Samaria an enemy territory? After the Northern kingdom and Samaria fell to the Assyrians, many Jewish people were deported to Assyria. This resulted in mixed races with intermarriage. Those who intermarried were judged by the Jews who lived in the Southern Kingdom as impure. The mixed race was called Samaritans.

Mixed marriages are still judged as unacceptable to this day, not just for racial purity but also for religious beliefs.

The first thing that Jesus did against the “norm” was to head through Samaria as He didn't judge these “inter-mixed” people.

It was around about noon and the hottest time of the day as Jesus sits by Jacob's well when a Samaritan woman approaches. Most people during that time would have been resting. Most women would come early in the morning or late in the evening to collect water.

Why would this woman collect her water at this time? She was a woman who had been married 5 times and was now living with someone who wasn't her husband. In other words, she was not at all popular in her community, had been shunned and rejected by

others. She would not come when the other women were out as they knew her reputation.

What the community says and the way it treats her has become how she sees and defines herself.

I wonder if we can identify times that we have done the same thing. We have a story about “others” and if we critique them often enough and long enough, they will know exactly what we think of them.

The second thing that Jesus does “against the norm” is to speak to a Samaritan woman, known to be living in sin, unaccompanied in a public space.

She responds to His request in challenging Him – I am a Samaritan woman, you are a Jew, a teacher and a man. It’s like this can’t be happening. Doesn’t He realise how wrong this is? But here she is, approaching the well and there He is, no friends, no water bag, maybe this is her chance for a little pay-back.

She gets launched on every hot topic from gender and religion to politics and culture wars. Perhaps this is the kind of talk we may hear at the local pub or sadly in some local pulpits around the place. However, Jesus doesn’t take the bait on any of it. Jesus knows all about her and doesn’t need to point out the differences. Jesus, in His divine intentionality sought to meet this specific woman at this specific time.

After asking the Samaritan woman for a drink, He responds to her by offering her something greater. He says: “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.”

Just as the Samaritan woman was looking to men to satisfy her soul, we also look to things outside of Christ to give our hearts meaning and purpose. However, as Jesus revealed Himself to her, He sought to show her that He was the never-ending water she was so thirsty for.

Jesus is the living water that we need. When we put our faith and trust in Him as the Living Water, we can bank on the fact that the well will never run dry. He will never tire of us. He will never dissatisfy. He will never turn us away. He is the unending source of peace, joy, love, self-control, truth, hope, and satisfaction. Abundant life can only be found in Him.

In response to hearing the Good News, the woman went to serve and create a space for others to meet and get to know Jesus too.

Are we introducing others to Jesus, sharing the big story of the Bible, and serving in mission?

Or are we just sitting at the well in the heat trying to win a debate?

Just as the Samaritan woman did not fully understand who Jesus was at first, we also need Jesus to open our eyes to the reality of who He is. It is only in Jesus that we will be saved from our sins and made new in Christ. Jesus puts our sin and shame to death on the cross and calls us to walk in His light.

Jesus broke all the “accepted norms” because the good news is for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position or past sins.

We must be prepared to share the good news at any time and in any place.

Jesus crossed all barriers to share the good news and we who follow Him must do no less.

Many spiritual functions parallel physical functions. As our bodies hunger and thirst, so do our souls. Our souls need spiritual food and water.

The woman confused the 2 kinds of water, perhaps because no-one had ever talked with her about her spiritual hunger and thirst before.

We would not think of depriving our bodies of food and water when we hunger and thirst. Why then should we deprive our souls?

The Living Word, Jesus Christ and the Written Word, the Bible, can satisfy our hungry and thirsty souls.