

St Mary Maldon
10 Parish Mass
14th March 2020
Lent 3 – Year A

“Sir, you have no bucket.”

I want you to imagine you are an onlooker at the scene I have just read.

You are a Samaritan.

It is hot.

It is the middle of the day.

You see a well.

Jacob’s well.

It is at the foot of the mountain.

Mount Gerazim.

The mountain where we Samaritans had our Temple before it was destroyed
by the Jews.

You see a man sitting at the foot of the well.

A Jewish man.

A stranger.

A Jew in the middle of Samaritan territory.

Who is he?

See a woman is approaching the well.

She is on her own.

You know her.

She does not mix with the other women.

She is an outcast.

A fallen woman.

She has had five husbands and is living with another man.

Surely the Jewish man will ignore her.

Jews don’t speak to us Samaritans.

But look!

He **is** speaking to her.

Does he know who she is?

Are his intentions honourable?

“Give me a drink”, you hear him say.

She is shocked.

“How do you, a Jew ask me a Samaritan for a drink?”

But wait, now he seems to be offering **her** some water.

Some sort of living water.

She is having none of that.
He doesn't even have a traveller's skin bucket.
"Sir, you have no bucket."
But he is still offering her this water.
Water that is so good you will never be thirsty again.
He seems to be some sort of Jewish teacher, a Rabbi.
"If this water is so good, then give me some", she says.
She knows he can't.
He has no bucket.
"Sir, you have no bucket."

This is getting interesting.
What will he do now?
He changes tack.
"Go call your husband."
Perhaps he will fetch a bucket for this water.
This is going to be awkward for her.
What will she say?
"I have no husband."
True.
Now he is challenging her.
"You have five husbands", he is saying.
She is obviously startled.
Clearly this man is more than a rabbi.
He must be a prophet.
She recognises that.
"Sir, I see you are a prophet", she is saying.
What will the woman do now?
She is changing the subject.
She is starting a theological argument.
Always a good way of diverting attention.
"Where should we worship God?", she is asking.
Here, the place of the last Samaritan Temple, before it was destroyed by your people.
Or down south in Jerusalem?
Will this prophet have the answer to that one?
He does, so it seems.
But his answer is not straight forward.
He is telling her that it will be in neither place.
Because God is not in one place.

He is spirit.
Like the wind.
The woman does not seem to understand this.
The prophet is confusing her.
She goes back to safer ground.
“I know the Messiah is coming”, she says.
But what is this man saying now?
“I am the Messiah”, he says.
“I am he who is speaking to you.”

Who is this man without a bucket?
A stranger?
A rabbi?
A prophet?
The Messiah?
The woman is bewildered.
She is confused.
She is leaving the well.
Look, she has even left her water jar behind.
She is going back to the city.
Let's follow her.
“Come and see a man who has told me everything I have done” she is saying.
Can he be the Messiah?
The crowd look puzzled.
They are going to see for themselves.

All this happened two days ago.
It turns out the name of this man is Jesus.
And you know what the villagers are saying to the woman “It is no longer because of what you said that we have believed, for we have heard for ourselves and this man is truly the saviour of the world”
So I wonder who he really is.
A Jewish stranger?
A rabbi?
A prophet?
The Messiah?
Or the saviour – God himself?

So, what are we two thousand years later to make of this story?
We have seen Jesus breaking down all social and religious barriers.

Talking to a fallen Samaritan woman.
And there's a message there for us.
And he uses the incident to reveal his identity by stages.
A stranger.
A rabbi.
A prophet.
A messiah.
The saviour.

So how do we see Jesus?
Is he a stranger to us?

Do we see him as a rabbi – a teacher?
Do we study the Bible to see what he has to say?

Do we see him as a prophet, speaking on behalf of God the Father?
Muslims of course see him as that, read the Qu'ran and see.

Or do we see him as more than these things, the Messiah?
The one long promised to the Jewish people?

Or do we see him as the saviour, as those Samaritans did after he had stayed with them for two days.

One who can transform a community as he did there?

One who challenges us to rethink our values.

So we can be a meaningful presence in the challenging times we have at present.

Be a transformative presence in our community when it needs us.

Show them what a living faith means.

By being a calm presence.

By showing God's love, that new life, that living water, among those who are anxious and distressed?

By showing hope and having faith?

Do we see Jesus as one who can give us this living water?

Or are we like the woman at the well.

Do we, when offered this gift, look askance, have doubts and say to Jesus.

"How can you give us this gift?"

"Sir, you have no bucket."