

Sunday 8 March 2026
The Third Sunday of Lent

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Exodus 17.1-7

NT: Romans 5:1-11

Gp: John 4: 5-42

During this last week or so, the world seems to have imploded and there is an escalation of horrific conflict and fighting in the world. Such conflict has resulted in several people being stranded in countries like Dubai, whilst flying to other destinations. This happened to my sister-in-law, but thankfully, she is now safely back home in Melbourne with my brother and nephews. I was fortunate and blessed to visit my brother, sister-in-law and nephews in January and early February and thankfully didn't encounter any difficulties.

As well as travelling to Melbourne, I had the pleasure of travelling a little closer to home last weekend, to Doncaster. It is my husband's birthday on the 1st of March and every year we travel to a race meeting, usually Doncaster, sometimes Catterick to celebrate his birthday. When you go to a race meeting, there are various entrances- the tattersalls, the county enclosure or the grandstand. In addition to this, you can ask for a concession, IE if you are a student or an Old Aged Pensioner. Despite these different entrances and different fees, once you are in, everyone can enjoy watching the horses in the parade ring and watching the race and if you back a winner, you have the fun of collecting your winnings.

In the kingdom of God, there are no different entrances or concessions, the kingdom is open to all. Jesus demonstrates His disregard for the classification of people by religion, culture, race or gender in the Gospel passage we have listened to today.

So let us linger a bit longer with the remarkable story of the woman at the well, found in the Gospel of John. This narrative unfolds with a seemingly ordinary moment—a weary traveller pausing to rest—yet it gives us profound truths about grace, acceptance, and the power of transformation. Jesus, making His way through Samaria, chooses to stop by Jacob's well, a place rich with ancestral history. Here, He encounters a Samaritan woman, who arrives alone in the midday heat to draw water. Her solitary presence at this hour hints at a life shadowed by social stigma and personal hardship; perhaps she came to the well at this time to avoid the scrutiny and whispers of her neighbours.

What happens next is extraordinary. Jesus initiates a conversation by asking her for a drink, crossing boundaries of culture, religion, and gender. Jews and Samaritans lived with mutual suspicion and prejudice, rarely sharing a word, let alone a cup. In addition to this, men in that society did not speak to women in public, especially those whose reputations were considered questionable. Yet Jesus does not see her through the lens of societal judgement. Instead, He gazes into her heart, meeting her as she is. Jesus does not wonder if she paid to enter the county enclosure or the tattersalls, he just spends time with her.

Jesus speaks to the woman about "living water"—an offer that goes beyond the physical thirst that brought her to the well. Jesus invites her into a spiritual reality, promising a spring of life that wells up to eternity. The woman, puzzled yet intrigued, asks for this water, hoping to be freed from the daily burden of drawing water and, perhaps, the burdens of her life. Jesus gently reveals that He knows her story: the truth of her relationships, her pain, her longing. But instead of condemning her, He offers compassion. In this exchange, we witness how the love of God surpasses all barriers and reaches into the depths of our personal struggles.

The woman responds not with shame but with wonder. She recognises that she is known, fully and deeply, yet still accepted. Jesus' words transform her perspective—her past, with all its brokenness, does not dictate her future. Moved by His grace, she leaves her water jar behind, a symbol of her old life and its burdens, and rushes back to her village. She proclaims to her neighbours, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

So if the water jar symbolized the woman's old life with all its burdens, what would be the symbol of our old life? Our old life before entering through the one open access point to the Kingdom of God- no concessions or cheap seats- just one way in, through Jesus?

This story is not only about the woman, but about each of us. God meets us in our ordinary routines, in the places where we feel unseen or unworthy. Whether at a well, on a street, or in the quiet moments of our day, He calls out to us, offering acceptance, forgiveness, and new purpose. The woman at the well becomes one of the first evangelists: her testimony, born from a single conversation, leads many in her town to believe in Jesus. She shows us that an authentic encounter with Jesus can move us from the margins of society to the centre of God's unfolding story.

I preached a sermon on this passage in a different church a few years ago. To illustrate the sermon, I used a scene from the series, *The Chosen*. In this scene Jesus says to the woman, ‘I have not revealed myself to anyone as the Messiah- you are the first. It would be good if you believed me’. She replies, ‘you picked the wrong person’. Jesus said, ‘I came to Samaria just to meet you, do you think it's an accident that I was here in the middle of the day?’ It goes on and she realizes and proclaims- ‘you are the Christ, I'm going to tell everyone!’ Jesus responds, ‘I was counting on it’. Jesus chose to reveal himself to the woman at the well, a woman who had been shunned by her neighbours and who came to draw water from the well when no one was around. I'd love you to watch that scene from *The Chosen*. It is so powerful and moving and it brought me to tears again when I rewatched it whilst preparing this sermon.

Jesus went to the well to meet the woman to share with her first that he was the Messiah, her response? To go and tell everyone. What is our response when Jesus the Messiah reveals himself to us in our lives? Do we rush out and tell everyone? Think about the times that Jesus has met us at the well, in our brokenness and hurt. Remember how it felt to know that Jesus was with you.

In this passage in John, we are reminded that transformation begins not with perfection, but with honesty. The woman's openness, even in the middle of her pain, becomes the door through which grace enters. She models for us the courage to face our truth and the humility to receive God's healing.

As we journey through life, may we remember the lesson of the woman at the well: God's grace is for all, regardless of our past or our origin. Let us open ourselves to His living water, which refreshes and restores. May we, like her, become bearers of the good news—sharing hope, acceptance, and transformation with a world longing for renewal. In a world of utter horror and abomination with all the conflict in various places, let us cling to the Good News, the love of Jesus. Let us remember and share with others, the Kingdom of God that is open to all- no concessions or various access points, God just welcomes us all with open arms and abundant and everlasting love. A love that knows no bounds. Also, may we never underestimate the power of a simple encounter to change a life and shape a community.

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