

## Readings for the Third Sunday in Lent

12<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

### Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

### Gospel: St John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you

greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’ They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest”? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.” I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’

Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.’

### **A Reflection for the Third Sunday in Lent**

We face many challenges in our world today, they include, war and violence, world poverty, climate change, global warming, drought and famine, migration and refugees. We are becoming increasingly aware that these challenges are interrelated. Climate change and global warming spark famine, drought, civil unrest, war and violence and, mass migration. On the face of it, these issues appear primarily as political or economic issues, but above all else they are

moral, ethical and spiritual issues. They are about our vision, our values, they are about who we are and what is our destiny.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus brings home to us how there is a spiritual foundation to every aspect of our lives. The dialogue between Jesus and the woman at the well is the longest dialogue between Jesus and any one individual. Jesus asks the woman for a drink of water; and she questions him as to why a Jew would ask a Samaritan woman for a drink. Jesus answered her, *"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,"* he says, *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* The woman jumps at the offer, *"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

This is the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus 'claims' the divine identity of 'I am'. He reveals it to a non-Jewish woman who is an outsider, shunned by the other women in her community who, because of her immoral life style, has to draw water from the well at noon when the other women of the village will not be there. She has had 5 husbands and is living with a man who is not her husband. It is to this non-Jewish immoral Samaritan woman that Jesus 'reveals his divine identity. When the woman asks about the coming Messiah, Jesus responds to her saying, *'I am he, the one talking to you'* From what is a seemingly mundane request for a drink of water, Jesus reveals the spiritual and ethical foundations that underpin all aspects of life.

When thirsty drought bound countries have to beg rich countries for aid for relief, it exposes the structures of inequality between the rich and poor, that are destroying our planets' wellbeing. It exposes the inequality that permeates our culture, and our way of thinking about God's creation. For too long the rich developed countries have seen the resources of the world as theirs to exploit for their own economic gain, irrespective of the fact that we are destroying the life system on which we depend.

Instead of over consumption, and greed, Jesus speaks of generosity and self-giving service. Instead of individualism, and over consumption, Jesus speaks of fellowship and neighbourly love and compassion. It is a message of hope. It is about recovering our rightful place in God's creation.

The effects of climate change will bring even greater challenges to our spiritual lives, forcing us to go beyond the joyful praise for material and emotional blessings that have traditionally characterised our worship together. We live in societies that bear the greater responsibility for the climate crisis. That should lead us to include more confession and lament in our worship, to seek forgiveness for where we have gone wrong, for the sin and selfishness that damages God's earth. Every difficult and confusing situation we face will challenge our faith and force us either to give up or to send our roots deeper down in search of living water. Our ultimate hope, sometime in the future, is that God will not give up on this world. No matter how we have in the past abuse its climate and its creatures, God will make all things new. Our basis for this hope is the resurrection of Jesus where the forces of greed and violence were defeated. With the help of God's Holy Spirit, it is a rejuvenating force capable of redeeming human lives and restoring a damaged creation.

This helps us to see a glimmer of light at the end of the long dark tunnel of the climate and ecological crisis. But we still have to go through the tunnel, we still have to cope with the increasing effects of global warming and ravaged

ecosystems. To be able to do this we need a way of making our ultimate hope in the future relevant and active in our own present time. We still need to engage in actions that may seem insignificant compared to the enormity of the crisis.

St Mary's environment subgroup have asked the Vestry to adopt an environmental policy and an action plan to make our small but essential contribution to making this ultimate hope a reality. I want to share this policy with you this morning. Our policy is aimed at taking what practical steps we can, to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth.

We will take environmental concerns into account in all aspects of our church life, including our worship, teaching, mission, pastoral, youth and children's work, training, administration, and charitable giving.

We will draw up an action plan and will review its progress. We will participate in the Eco Congregation programme and commit to undertaking an environmental check-up and energy audit of the church to identify the most significant issues which should be addressed and to make and implement plans and programmes to tackle them, recognising that some additional costs may be incurred.

We will seek to reduce our energy use and our greenhouse gas emissions.

We will encourage church members wherever possible to use forms of transport to work, meetings etc. which have minimum or reduced environmental impact and to car share where possible.

We will serve food, where possible:

- Choosing local produce
- Choosing fair trade products

We will seek ways to reduce our material consumption and the impact of our activities on the environment wherever possible.

We will avoid using water unnecessarily.

We will manage our garden for the benefit of wildlife and to conserve biodiversity.

We will encourage individual members of our congregation to take actions in their personal lives to complement and supplement these actions of the church community.

We will establish links with community organisations with a view to sharing our environmental ministry and to participate in local environmental initiatives where possible.

We will seek to support and benefit people across the world. We commit to:

- Supporting the work of Christian Aid
- promoting fair trade.
- supporting our Green Screen initiative.

We will communicate this policy to our congregation, church groups and all users of the church and seek their cooperation to follow these guidelines.

This policy is like tree planting – it is an act of intergenerational optimism. It is easy to lose hope and to argue what is the point of going green, of making small insignificant gestures in the face of an overwhelming environmental crisis – but that is not the point. We act because of who we are. It is an expression of our values and principles. We do them to remain true to ourselves and to the spiritual values that Jesus has taught us.