

LENT 3A
ALL SAINTS BIRKENHEAD
THE REVEREND JORDA GREATBATCH

I wonder if you have a favourite watering hole? Perhaps you were there on Friday for St Patrick's Day. Somewhere special you go to go quench your thirst. Maybe a local Café, a pub, a friend's place for morning tea? Where ever you go to quench your thirst I wouldn't mind betting you go for more than just a drink. It would seem that part of the purpose of a favourite watering hole is actually the chance to meet friends and relax with them. It's a chance to talk about what's important to us. A chance to ponder our difficulties, maybe the chance to meet new people and build connections in the community.

Watering holes are important places for they provide more than just an outward drink. In fact our inner thirst may also be quenched, even for a short while in these places. I'm sure the local pub could be a good place for ministry.

Our Gospel today has Jesus at the watering hole when he was thirsty. He needed a drink to quench his thirst, and it is here that he meets someone else. Connects with another person. The woman at the well was also at the watering hole. She came to quench her thirst and perhaps the thirst of others. But she got more than just her physical thirst

quenched. She discovered her inner thirst and how she might also quench her inner thirst.

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I suppose if we are to quench our thirst, either outwardly or inwardly, we have to admit we have a thirst. We have to admit we need something, that there is some part of us that isn't fully complete. That perhaps inwardly we are not fully satisfied with what the world offers us. Recognising we are thirsty leads to life.

Jesus knew he needed a drink and sat by well, waiting for someone to come with a bucket so he could fetch the water. For when the woman comes Jesus asks 'Give me a drink.' By this simple request Jesus himself is acknowledging his need, but Jesus also opens a conversation. If he'd said to her straight out from the start "I've got water for you so you won't be thirsty again." She would probably have said "no thanks."

But by accepting and acknowledging his own need he opened himself up. You could even say he was vulnerable. And it is through this vulnerability that the woman is able to respond. For it is not easy to refuse a basic request for help. So often we want to give help to others, for we desire to be the one's

doing the giving, and in a way this is because we want to hold the balance of power in our relationships. Perhaps we are scared of being vulnerable, perhaps we don't actually ask for help when we need it. Jesus shows us, that it is not a weakness to ask for help, but rather a strength.

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And so we have Jesus begin his discussion with the woman at the well from a point of need. He makes a simple request for help and in that way the woman enters into dialogue, she recognizes his openness, so she too can be open. And it is through this process that she in fact discovers her own need. And by the process of discovering her own need she is also able to discover the solution within herself. And so a strange sort of wisdom is found here in this story.

It is almost as if the greatest good we can do for others is not to always meet their needs. Not to uncritically give them of our own riches, but rather lead them to realise the greatest good can sometimes be to help people discover their own riches. Help them discover that sometimes what they are looking for has always been there, they have just not yet realized it and had the courage to act on it.

And courage is an important thing to remember here. For it is not an easy task to be so open. Sometime we need to challenge those boundaries that we create. Not the healthy boundaries of self-care, but rather the boundaries that we or society creates to hold us back from finding our God given identities. For in order for thirst to be quenched in our story today the woman and Jesus had to break some boundaries.

“How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me a woman of Samaria?” For a Jew to drink from a Samaritan woman's bucket would be like you or me eating bread and butter off a plate the cat had licked. The other boundary they broke was that men and women didn't speak to each other in public

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So there was a gender boundary as well as the racial and religious ones. By breaking these boundaries they treated each other with mutual respect, they treated each other firstly as human beings in need.

Breaking boundaries is still a way to discover the water of life. Breaking race, gender, religious social or any other boundaries that cut us off from

people opens channels of communication which enables new life to occur. Perhaps going for a beer at the pub is not such a bad thing. Jesus himself broke through the boundaries of his day. What are ours? For if we stay where we are with the boundaries firmly drawn, chances are we will perhaps remain thirsty.

Having broken the boundaries the woman then questions Jesus. She tests him, she tries him out to discover his inner motives for speaking to her. She wants to know who this strange man is who accosts her by the watering hole.

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And so Jesus is patient with her. He doesn't brush her aside or become irritated by her questions. But rather he eventually reveals himself to her when she says 'I know the messiah is coming'. Jesus says 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you'. And through this knowledge, another thirst is now quenched. And in turn the thirst for the coming one is now fulfilled. We too have this inner thirst to know Jesus, the one sent from God. We want to improve our knowledge and our experience of him. Like the woman, we test him, we try him out, and we ask questions and lack understanding. But in the end we know what we seek dwells in Jesus. And so on our Lenten journey we seek the God revealed in

Jesus. We seek the new life of Easter to be made real for us again.

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And so the text asks us where our watering holes? More goes on there than simply having a drink. Watering holes are places where relationships are established, strengthened or renewed. They are places where we can acknowledge our need, break through some boundaries, discover Jesus who we have been looking for discover and accept ourselves.

Jesus invitation to us today is to trust that process. We see it happen for the woman at the well. We can also see it happen for us. Maybe our Lenten journey is not so much about bemoaning our sins and wickedness, but rather to acknowledge our need to break through some boundaries to discover Jesus who we have been looking for. To discover and accept ourselves. Maybe this will help us find eternal life within.

Jesus said, "Those who drink the water I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside them, welling up to eternal life." Let us drink.