

**Sermon: 2020/03/15 (3rd Sunday in Lent) - Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; &, John 4:5-42\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front. Flip-chart, pens; hammer. Draw a series of identical rocks, one-per page.]

When I was a boy, I *loved* dinosaurs.

I used to borrow books from the library and *devour* them: I wanted to know *everything!*

And this led me to dream about being a palaeontologist.

I would scour the beach on vacation, with a hammer in hand, looking to smash open rocks and find a fossil inside.

[Pretend to hit the first rock. Draw a crack.]

And do you know how many fossils I found?

[Pause.]

None.

I *never* found a single one.

Other people, luckier than me, occasionally find fossils, of course.

[Turn the page. Draw an ammonite.]

And *some* people - even fewer, mind - find crystals or diamonds inside of rocks.

[Turn the page. Draw a diamond.]

*Usually*, though, do you know what happens when you smash open a rock?

Do you know what you find inside?

Nothing.

Dust.

Just more...rock.

[Turn the page. Draw nothing.]

Well, one day Moses was with the Hebrews in the desert, during the escape from slavery in Egypt, and they began to complain about how *thirsty* they were:

"Give us a drink, Moses!" They shouted at him.

"Give us a drink. Don't let us die in this hot dry desert."

So, Moses prayed to God and God said: "Take your walking-stick in hand, and strike the rock I will show you."

And that's what Moses did.

He took his stick and hit a rock, and *gush!* Water everywhere; enough for everyone.

[Draw streams of water.]

It was a miracle.

God had done it again.

He had taken "the ordinary" and made it *extraordinary*: water out of a rock where usually there's only more of the same.

And He can do something similar with us too.

He can make *extraordinary* things come out of us, like kindness to strangers and charity to those-in-need.

Let's pray:

Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

This is undoubtedly one of the very most famous episodes from Christ's ministry. Indeed, fearing that you've probably heard *every, possible* sermon on this particular text I was, I confess, tempted to ignore it, (and maybe speak on the epistle or psalm).

And I imagine many of you *could* easily list the *many* "teaching-points" it presents us with!

About how, for example, Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is a triumph over racism and close-minded tribalism, perhaps?

But I will endeavour to do my best as a preacher must.

Indeed, I think topical questions around the coronavirus and how we as Christians should respond can find their answers in a new meditation on this text.

So, let's jump straight in:

Taking the passage as whole - looking at it with a "bird's eye view" - notice how the thing; that task that the woman came to do - collect water for her home in a bucket - gets *completely* forgotten;

that her priorities are *completely* up-ended by the conversation with Christ - they shift, suddenly and dramatically;

and she becomes busy about something else *entirely*.

I quote: 'Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.'

And she said 'to the people' - that's a clear plural - "'Come and see a man...'" - the

'Messiah', no less.

Remember, these were the exact people she had just been avoiding.

She had been avoiding their company;

their criticism; their gossip and stares.

Now, she's evangelising to them!

We've gone from one extreme to another.

*And within a matter of minutes!*

And do bear in mind that she's not only risking some unkind words - a little "slut-shaming" is the expression, I believe - but she was in *real*, life-or-death danger of being arrested and stoned by the leadership of the 'city':

For she was widely known to be living with a man who was, as Jesus says, 'not your husband.' Right?

And this is the central miracle of the episode, by the way:

Jesus saw this strange woman and knew 'everything I have ever done!'

That's *her* description of the conversation.

It is not just then, that Jesus, like Sherlock Holmes, deduces from her presence at the well in the (scorching) midday heat, that this woman was a pariah; an outcast; a misfit.

That's not miraculous.

That's one plus one equals two.

But something more interesting took place here:

He - Jesus - had some kind of *super*-natural "access" to her biography.

He knew intimate, secret stuff about that woman;

the sort of "stuff" one would know only *if* they were 'begotten and not made', of 'one being with the Father' and so had seen the (heavenly) 'Book of Life' described in *Revelation*.

Indeed, given the repetition of the word 'everything' by the woman, I do firmly believe that John has, in fact, only paraphrased the encounter between she and Jesus.

I think he is indicating that there was, in fact, much, much more *substance*, much more *content* to the conversation that was had that day, between the two of them.

And he's offering us merely a summary.

And he couldn't have offered us more than a "summary" anyway because, after all, he wasn't present:

he was a disciple and what did we hear at the beginning about them?

'(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)'

So, this woman, risking incarceration and execution for what was *criminal* promiscuity in 1st century Palestine - illegal behavior: too much sex with the wrong people - speaks to 'many' of her neighbours - that's a quote: 'many', *completely* indifferent to their opinion of her; *completely* indifferent to their potential to denounce and witness against her, because she was focused, *intently*, on something else: the Kingdom.

Water-collection, shameful cohabitation with a boyfriend, and fearing unkindness - these things; these concerns which initially defined her were of *this* world, and she abandons them - *utterly* - in her excitement for the (new) world-that-is-to-come.

And I think that is *precisely* something we need to hear at this time of Coronavirus pandemonium.

Because we are the woman at the well.

We are also seen by Jesus in all of our *un*-glory and tawdry ordinariness.

And we too are challenged by His love for us to leave behind whatever our water-buckets are for the sake of building His vision of what-will-be.

And to make that *exchange* with the same boldness that she had.

Maybe that might mean in this moment *not* bulk-buying medical masks and toilet-paper and hand-sanitiser.

Because why?

Am I so much more important than my neighbour that I should have all those supplies that he or she needs equally?

Is it more important to preserve my health than it is for you, yours?

Or maybe we need to take more seriously that Jesus promises us we will 'reap' a gift from Him of 'eternal life'?

What, then, do I need fear?

*Nothing!*

What is pain, what is sickness, what is some new virus when Jesus lives forever and offers me the same?

There is so much anxiety right now - and it is poison.

The woman at the well was isolated and friendless; trapped in shame and regret.

But anxiety about "corona" in America right now has led to a 28% drop in the Dow! *Forbes* magazine is comparing it to 2007's "Great Recession".<sup>[n.1]</sup>

JPMorgan economists now expect US GDP to shrink by 2%.<sup>[n.2]</sup>

Already on the news there's talk of closures and lay-offs and mass unemployment.

All all the progress in the economy of the last few years hangs by a thread.

And these headlines are devastating on a personal level; in communities like McMinnville.

They mean bills don't get paid,  
marriages get strained,  
children don't get fed,  
foreclosures and so on.

So, my message to you is: *be bold*.

Respect others' wishes, yes, about personal space; and take practical steps to protect *them*, but you?

You be fearless.

Be like the Samaritan woman at the well.

Live and work and spend like you're already in the world which Jesus says has

'drawn near' where there is no disease or dying.  
Courage and optimism is infectious too.

Footnotes:

1. See: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2020/03/13/market-crashes-compared28-coronavirus-crash-vs-4-historic-market-crashes/#6a0dc2b44ee8>
2. See: <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/coronavirus-fuel-recession-forecast-us-europe-economic-july-market-jpmorgan-2020-3-1028994637>