

Isn't that the type of water that you want? Doesn't that sound like the sort of thing you'd like to receive?

This is the water that will quench our deepest thirst. It will become a spring bubbling up inside us, refreshing and reviving us "with the new life which is coming into the world with Jesus and which is the life of the whole new world God is making" (see *Wright, John for Everyone*).

"Sir", said the Samaritan Women, "give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you are, Jesus has good news for you - a drink that will quench your thirst, water that will satisfy, and lead to life.

Study questions:

- Read through the story of the women at the well (John 4:4-26) reflectively. Try to imagine the flow of the conversation, the tone of the voices, the facial expressions and body language.
- What jumps out at you from the passage? Do you relate to any part of the story in particular?
- Read John 4:23-24. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth?
- What is the good news (the gospel) for you? What does it mean for the people who you know? Who are the people who need to know good news?

Application:

- Where are you in need of refreshment? Where do you need to be revived?
- Pray to be filled afresh with God's spirit.

Prayer

- Read Revelation 22:17. Meditate for a moment on the invitation and respond in prayer (you may like to spend a few minutes in silent prayer).

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- **The ALPHA COURSE, beginning on Monday 30th September at Café Culture. Pray for those joining the course and for the leaders and helpers.**
- **Jeanette and Ron Happ, as they prepare to visit St Mark's on 13th October, and for their ongoing work with Interserve in Nepal**
- **The residents and staff of the various care homes in our town.**



St Mark's

**Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything**

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

**Week Beginning:
29th September 2013**

BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY – MEETING JESUS WHERE WE ARE

WORSHIP:

Read Isaiah 55:1-2. Give thanks to God for the wide arms of love that he extends to you and to all people. Offer your praise to the Lord.

READINGS: Ecclesiastes 1:1-9 & John 4:4-26

PART 1: HEBEL

There's a moving scene in the film '127 Hours' in which the film's protagonist Aron Ralston happens upon a pool of murky, stagnant, fly-infested water. Ralston has been trapped in an isolated canyon for, you guessed it, 127 hours, and is desperately thirsty. Upon seeing the water he plunges himself facedown into the pool and drinks compulsively – urgently seeking to quench his thirst. He fills his hitherto empty water bottle with the liquid – the water brown and filled with sediments, looks wonderful to the thirsty man.

I think it is a picture of all of us. We travel through life thirsty for purpose and meaning – desperately searching for anything that looks like it will satisfy our thirst. Gulping in anything that hints of giving us some kind of life, something that will keep us going. And if we're honest, sometimes those things appear to satisfy us – they seem to sate the insatiable. Hedonism tastes good. Narcissism makes me feel better. Yet after a while our thirst becomes more demanding. That which met the need suddenly isn't enough. The things that offered so much and expected so little, begin to expect everything and offer next to nothing. We begin to notice the colour of the water.

Our first reading was taken from Ecclesiastes, found in the Old Testament, written before the time of Jesus. Ecclesiastes has long been considered to be one of the most peculiar, controversial and surprising books of the Bible. It's mysteriously named author 'The Teacher' or 'Qohelet' takes us through his quest for meaning in life and its experiences. Qohelet isn't reluctant to share his disillusioned view of existence – he gets right to the point:

‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’ (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

The word translated in our version as ‘meaningless’ is translated in other versions as ‘vanity’, ‘futile’, ‘absurd’, or ‘worthless’ (amongst others). In the original Hebrew the word used is *Hebel*. Essentially it is comparable to breath or vapour – that which can’t quite ever fully grasp, or get a hand on, that which is temporal, transient and enigmatic. It’s there before you, but you can’t get a hold of it.

Qohelet’s observation that all is *hebel* is underscored by the lack of *yitrôn* (profit) that people gain from all their toil ‘under the sun’ (1:3).

Yitrôn, another central word in Qohelet’s pronouncements, is “possibly a commercial term for what is left after all expenses are taken into account” (Crenshaw, 1988, 59). For Qohelet, life is profitless because of the certainty (and finality) of death. Ultimately everything is *hebel* because of this inherent truth. Because of chance and transitoriness, there can be no such “gain” for human beings. Everything comes up short, nothing leads to profit.

At this point you might relate to the person invited to church by their friend. “Would you like to come to church with me this week”, says the friend. “No thanks”, comes the reply, “I feel bad enough about myself already”.

It’s probably at this point then that we should hear a little about hope...

PART 2: WHOEVER YOU ARE, WHEREVER YOU ARE, WHATEVER YOU ARE

I want you to picture the scene – Jesus, a Jewish Rabbi (Teacher and Holy Man) engages in conversation with a Samaritan Women in the middle of the day. It might not immediately strike you as particularly shocking or odd... It’s around about noon. Man meets women at well. Man is thirsty and asks for a drink. Women gives man drink. Man tells women he has an altogether more satisfying drink. Woman asks for said drink. Slightly unusual perhaps, for us tap users, but it’s probably what they did in those days we’re thinking.

Let me get you to imagine another scene – a politician meets a businessman at 3 in the morning, in the backstreets of the city. Immediately you’re thinking scandal, shadiness, suspicion. It rings those bells.

For those familiar with Jesus’ culture it would have done the same – bells would be rings. In the words of the MOBO award winning UK Garage girl group Mis-Teeq, this situation was ‘So Scandalous’.

For a start the Jews and the Samaritans were not, shall we say, particularly fond of each other. The Jews wouldn’t have anything to do with the Samaritans, and vice versa.

Furthermore, at that time many devout Jewish men would not have allowed themselves to be alone with a woman. If it were unavoidable, then they would certainly not strike up a conversation. “The risk, they would have thought was too high – risk of impurity, risk of gossip, risk ultimately of being drawn into immorality” (see *Wright, John for Everyone*).

Added to this is the question - who goes to the well in the middle of the day? It was when the sun was at its most scorching. It would be like hosting the World Cup in Qatar in the middle of summer. Madness!

Of course, those who went to the well at that time of day were doing so for a reason. They were trying not to be seen. They had something to hide. It was a time when it was least likely that you’d be seen by those who knew you, and knew your past. (I can sense the introverts amongst us thinking that that would probably be the time that we’d go to the well). But the truth is, it was when the outcast, the reject, the condemned of society would go. Surely a holy man like Jesus would have nothing to do with such a person, this Samaritan women of dubious character.

Of course it was exactly the type of person Jesus would spend time with. Those on the fringes, those on the edge of the crowd - the failure, the has-been, the misfit, the underachiever, the write-off, the disillusioned, the broken, the poor, the damaged, the social outcast, the sinner.

Jesus loved spending time with these people. These are the people who he gravitated towards. He had good news to tell them.

And so we see with the Samaritan women and the extraordinary conversation:

“Give me a drink”, said Jesus to the Samaritan women. She nearly fell down the well. This just didn’t happen.

The Samaritan woman, no doubt with a hint of suspicion, said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

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.”

(Jesus is the only man in history who could truthfully say that he is God’s gift to women)

The woman is intrigued and a little confused. What is this man talking about? He doesn’t even have a bucket!

“Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”

She’s on a roll. She begins to tease him.

“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.”