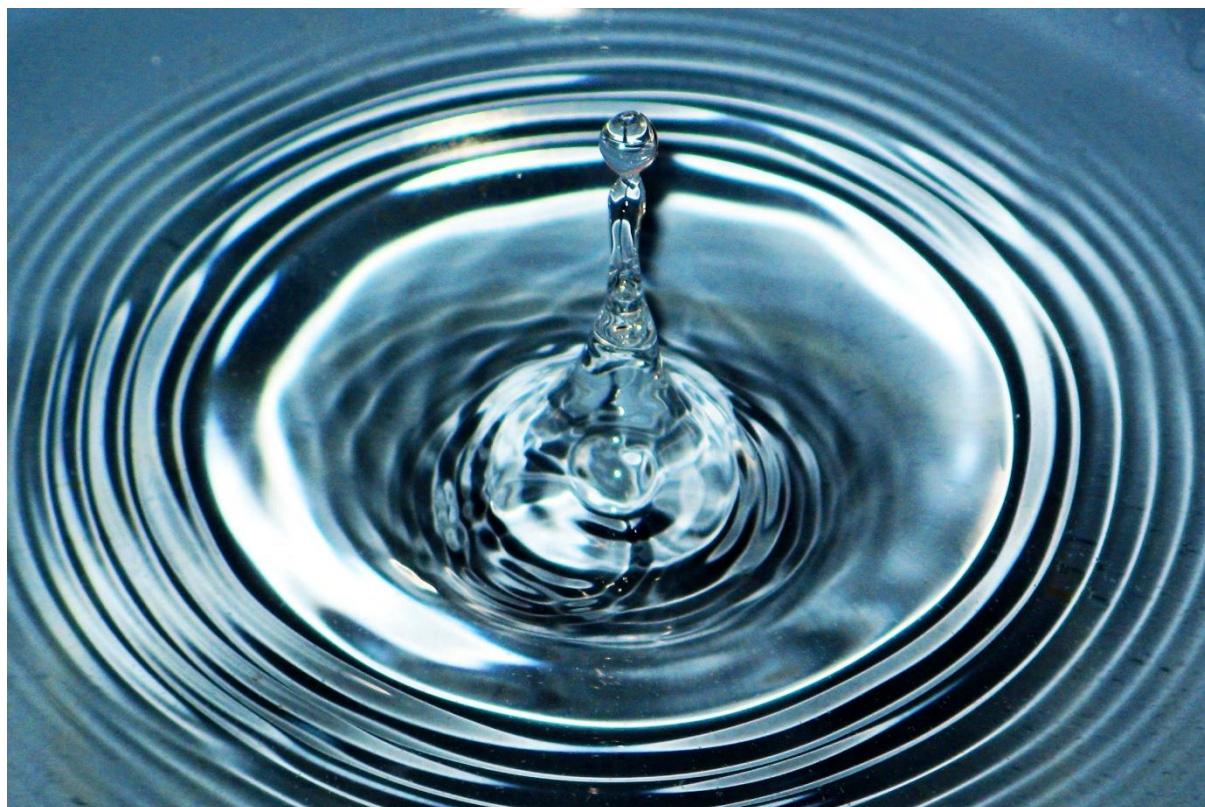


ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



12 MARCH 2023

LENT 3



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

HYMN TIS 154 Great is your faithfulness...

Prayer for today

In the wilderness of life
You meet us, God of love
and you open up
streams of living water
to quench our thirst
and help us continue
live your way

Wherever we are
whatever may have happened
before
Here, now, You are
bridegroom, temple, rock, source
Ready to help us see
a future path
beyond our imagining.

You who called the woman to the well
You who called Moses to open up
wellsprings of life
in the middle of the wilderness
You call us to come
and witness to your love
sustaining our life.
Call us to open up and make way
for the wellsprings of your healing grace.

Anneke Oppewal

Assurance Of Forgiveness

Here is Good News! God is willing to cleanse us from our pride, our blindness, our stubborn insistence on having things “our way”. Through God’s grace we are washed and forgiven.

Thanks be to God

Amen.

HYMN: TIS 703 As the deer pants for water...

Scripture

From the Hebrew scriptures

Exodus 17:1-7

Water from the Rock

17From 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. 2The 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?’ 3But 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?’ 4So Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ 5The 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. 6I 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. 7He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’

From the New Testament

John 4:5-42

5So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. 8(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9The 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.) 10Jesus 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.’ 11The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.

Where do you get that living water? 12Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' 13Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but 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.' 15The 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.'

16 Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' 17The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; 18for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.' 19The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' 21Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23But 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. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' 25The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' 26Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

27 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?' 28Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' 30They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' 32But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' 33So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' 34Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35Do 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. 36The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." 38I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They 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.'

HYMN: TIS 687, God gives us a future...

A Pastoral Letter:

Sermon to be preached at Ormond Uniting Church on Sunday, 12th March 2023. Refer to the readings from *Exodus and John* above.

Well met!

Today's readings direct our attention to water. In the reading from Exodus we are in the Sinai wasteland. We witness the people complaining that God has let them down, because he has not provided water and they are thirsty. In response, God tells Moses to strike a certain rock with his staff and water runs out. A good story, without a doubt. A happy ending. Fairy-tale stuff. But Moses is anything that pleased and God is not pleased either. God and Moses agree that the people should not put God to the test.

In the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, the rules seem to be reversed. Now we have Jesus (read "God") as the one who's thirsty. And it is the nonbeliever who eventually provides the drink. Physically, that is. Real water! Jesus, in exchange, quenches a metaphoric thirst with a metaphoric drink.

The stories are, of course, related. The Evangelist who told this story of Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman is well aware of the earlier story in Exodus. The Jesus story recalls that story in the context of the Exodus. Jesus is the new Moses. The later story is a development of the earlier story, but just as the earlier Exodus story is told within the context of an old covenant with God, (a covenant relating to the exclusivity of the Jewish people), in the story of the Samaritan woman, there is a new covenant at work in which foreigners, indeed, all people, are included in the agreement.

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman and recognises her as a foreigner and an enemy. By the time he leaves, the woman has become part of the great salvation of all people, and we note in the story that people from her village also came to the party and recognised themselves as saved.

The story is simplicity itself if we read it properly and there is no need for me to labour the point. Its message is absolutely essential for us in this day and age. There are people out there who we do not approve of. And that goes for the irritating person next door, the coloured person the foreign person and the person who does not share our faith – men?

And it includes the enemy.

Part of our problem these days is that it is not always clear who the enemy is (or maybe it's too clear). We are told by authorities (and people "in the know") who the enemy is. We know that the dreaded Vlad is an enemy. But we are also told that people who are not like us are enemies too. And it's hard to know where the truth lies.

Maybe it was easier in Jesus day. You didn't have to know that the Samaritans were enemies. You just knew it. You were born into it. Your culture made up your mind for you. I suppose that this applies to today as well. There is a lot of advice around. Our enemies are packaged for us – delivered to the door so to speak.

I'm going to stop at this point and just to go to a meditation on the interchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. I am telling it from the point of view of Jesus himself. This is not a

passive exercise. I'm asking you to join me as a witness. I'm asking you to insert yourself into the story.

Imagine you are there:

Well met (a poem)

*Well met dear lady.
Have we met and been properly introduced?
Forgive the presumption;
I am a stranger in these parts,
and my wanderings have led me to this well
of blessed Jacob's fame.*

*I would quench my thirst
on this stinking hot day.*

*I did not come prepared for a dip,
and have no dipper at hand.
Can you help?
I note, by the way,
that you have had a rough trot;
passed from pillar to post in search of love and security.*

*I get it!
A woman has to do what a woman has to do.
It's not for me to judge.*

*Perhaps we could exchange favours: today;
you give me a drink of water and I give you some good advice.*

*Your attire and demeanour
highlight the distance between us:
(measured by belief and culture and birth).
Can you and I bridge the gaps that separate us?
Can I get across to you that while I thirst for what is in this well,
you thirst in equal or greater measure
for what is in the deeper well of life.*

*Judgment, condemnation and shunning
will get us nowhere and neither will guilt.
What is required of us is to lap up the available water in great gobs-full
from the well-spring that is me.
For I come not with empty hands
but with treasures that are the very substance of the good life:
like love, charity, hope, compassion, understanding, generosity and solidarity.*

*Well met indeed in this parched and barren land:
with our forays together into this no-man's land of togetherness*

*we will quench our thirst
and make a better world.*

May it be so

HYMN: TIS 588 In heavenly love abiding...

Prayer – Prepared by Dianne

Our prayers today are based on a prayer from Bruce Prewer's "Prayers for the 21st Century" and "Pray with our partners", a Lent event guide prepared by UnitingWorld.

Let us pray:

God of love, have mercy on the world of human affairs, where the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged seems to be ever widening. Help us to open our eyes to those who experience injustice and are excluded from opportunities.

We pray for all the victims of injustice including:

- the sick who cannot afford the latest in medical technology
- those living with a disability who experience physical barriers to full participation in community life as well as lack of recognition of their abilities and potential
- the hungry, unable to access food due to shortages, poverty and natural disasters
- indigenous minorities, whose health and education prospects lag far behind those of the general population
- women who experience gender violence and are not recognised in their cultures as equal with men
- people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and are ostracised by their communities
- the unemployed, cast aside by the digital revolution and poor education
- second and third generation refugees still living in camps set up last century
- small nations who are being exploited or shut out of markets by the strong and aggressive
- the poor who cannot pay for the cost of obtaining justice in courts of law
- island nations ravaged by the impacts of rising sea waters and climate change
- youth experiencing issues of suicide, drugs, addictions and crime. May the adults around them begin to openly acknowledge and talk about these issues
- people who experience loneliness and cannot find a path to acceptance and shared community

Dear God, you are not seen but you are present and felt. You see our dark sides, you hear pains and sufferings. Grant us courage and the wisdom to stand up for those who are down and lend a voice to those who cannot speak and are deliberately being silenced. Help us to work for inclusion of all people.. Assure us, all the time when we do justice, You have a place for us when our days here are finished.

And, knowing that we abide in your Heavenly Love and you are always round about us, let us join in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray together:

**Our Father in Heaven
Hallowed be your name**

**Your kingdom come
Your will be done
On earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever**

Amen

Blessing

May the eternal God bless us and keep us,
guard our bodies,
save our souls,
direct our thoughts,
and bring us safe to the heavenly country, our eternal home,
where Father, Son and Holy Spirit ever reign, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

HYMN: TIS 684 Love will be our Lenten calling...

Thoughts for the week to come

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for us!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When we put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When we embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear us far,
We hope to see our Pilot face to face
When we have crost the bar.

Alfred Lord Tennyson (amended)

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Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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Presider: Karel Reus

Music: Peter Hurley

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Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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