

# Well met! 12-03-2023

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.