



Sunday, 15 March 2020 – Lent 3
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Reading: St John 4 5-42
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

In the witness stand

Last week I put Nicodemus in the witness stand. He was a man beyond reproach, someone society wanted to be seen in company with. Today, we have a completely different person, someone society considered beneath contempt, a social pariah; we don't even know her name. Let's hear her story.

The evidence

You don't need to know my name, I'm no one important; to most people I'm just That woman. They think they know my story but of course they don't know the half of what brought me to this! If you were listening to the Gospel, you'll have picked up that I was at the well on my own. In the old days I'd to go with the other women for the banter and safety in numbers but things changed and there's only so many times you can take being given the cold shoulder.

I saw a man sitting at the well. When he spoke, I knew he was Jew not one of our own Samaritan men. That amazed me as the Jews look down their noses at Samaritans because we don't worship at the Temple in Jerusalem but at our own mountain that was sacred to our ancestor Jacob. Anyway, as you'll have gathered, I'm used to men. I didn't feel threatened by him, so I thought, I might just as well give him some water and, he looked tired.

Seeing from a fresh perspective

I decided poke a bit of fun at him being a Jew and all that but he came straight back with a direct challenge I could not ignore. He said if I knew who was really asking me for a drink, I'd be asking him for living water instead. I said "Really? Where's your bucket! Do you think you're greater than Jacob who dug the well?" He wasn't fazed. He said if I drank the water, he offered I'd never be thirsty again. Fantastic I thought! I'd never have to suffer the derision of the women at this wretched well again.

This man, however, was something else. He told me to go and call my husband. Yeah right! I came clean, I don't have one. Bless me, if he didn't say "That's true, you've had five husbands and the man you now live with isn't your husband!" For the first time in my life here was a man who made me see myself as I truly was and yet, I didn't feel put down but valued. I tried to bluster my way out of it, flattering him, well I didn't have to try too hard after all he had to be a prophet to know all that about me. The fact is, I was embarrassed about my life-style so, I threw him a challenge, "Why

do you Jews think it's so much better to worship in Jerusalem than on our holy mountain?"

He countered that saying forget the place of worship, it's the person you worship who is the important one: he alone brings salvation. This was a revelation! Then I understood him, he was talking about the Messiah. This other-worldly man, then said "I am he who's speaking to you." Like a bolt of lightning, I got it when he said I AM HE I knew, just as our ancestors had known, who the Great I AM is. I left my water pot and ran back to town. I didn't care what people thought of me, I just wanted to share this Good News. I'm so glad I did because he stayed in our town for two whole days teaching us and many believed his word with their own ears and open hearts and minds. I knew then all that happened in my past did not matter anymore, I felt redeemed and I had found my place once more in a community of like-minded hearts and people of faith.

Considering the evidence

That was the woman's story. She opened her heart to the Good News Christ offered. What can we learn from this account? I think four things:

1. Jesus alone is the living water that fills all voids in our lives with his redemptive love.
2. That he's not put off by our sin but rather seeks to reconcile us to his Father through forgiveness.
3. Jesus calls us to be transformed from our past and step into his light giving us new purpose not founded on transient earthly things but on the things eternal.
4. Once we have received the living water, we in turn can help to become the well-spring from which others can draw living faith.

Standing up to be counted

Our calling is to see Christ's potential in everyone. We should not presume to know the whole story of what has contributed to the way people present themselves to the world, as the disciples judged the Samaritan woman. As a Christian community we are work in progress called to take responsibility in faith for helping to fill other peoples' spiritual water pots, to quench their aching voids. In due course, if we enhance our church with the planned Servedy, it could be a space for the wider parish to find that sense of community of hearts and minds and spirits.

There's a Quaker Prayer which sums up what I'm trying to say, it goes like this:

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness;
bearing with one another,
forgiving one another,
praying with one another,
not antagonising one another but
helping one another up with a tender hand.

May God help us to make it so. Amen