

Breaking Barriers with Kindness

15 March 2020

Lent 3

Reading: John 4:5-42

I meet some really interesting people in my job. One such person was an older man in a rest home in Hornby. He was telling me his life story and it included being an engineer working on the Concorde. He was part of the team that designed the engines for the Concorde. I asked, “Was it difficult to design engines which could break the sound barrier?” “Not at all” he replied, “the hard part was working with the French!” Concorde was of course famous because it was a passenger jet that could break the sound barrier.

Today in our Gospel we see Jesus breaking barriers too, not the sound barrier but other barriers that are just as difficult. We see that Jesus breaks barriers of race, creed, class, gender, profession and status. And all of this in what looks like a causal chat by a well.

The location is all important. Jacob’s well. Jacob was the one who dreamed of the ladder going up and into heaven. And Jesus is that ladder, that link between heaven and earth. Since ancient times this place had been a sacred site. Bishop David recounted that when he was on pilgrimage in the Holy Land the group, he was with met at this well. They read this passage, lowered a bucket into the well, hauled it up and handed the water around and each drank. Then they all got diarrhoea!

Jesus is tired. He sits down in the noon day heat. A woman comes to draw water. The problem is that she is a Samaritan. For centuries before Jesus day Jews and Samaritans had hated each other. And she was a woman. The Pharisees taught that men and women were not to talk in public. Some even refused to talk to their wives in public. She comes at the hottest time of the day which immediately alerts us to another problem. She is doing this to avoid others which implies she is living an immoral life. He asks her for a drink, and

she is disbelieving, and Jesus' disciples have a fit when they discover what he has been up to.

Yet this is what it means to be the ladder at Jacob's well. It means Jesus bridging the gap between heaven and earth, men and women, Jew and Samaritan, sinner and rabbi, petty differences and lifegiving water.

But what of us, how can we follow Jesus example and break barriers, making our community a better place?

You don't need me to remind you that today is the anniversary of the terrible shootings at the two mosques. Bishop Peter wrote in his letter this week the importance of kindness and on this first anniversary of that tragic day last year I want to share with you a suggestion which arose at a recent Inter Faith Hui facilitated by our government. This suggestion is that we focus our remembrance on performing acts of kindness towards our fellow citizens so that we "keep alive the beautiful intentions that we saw last year to be as one, to come together in our diversity and to support all those in need." To act kindly is to acknowledge our connectedness to one another, to demonstrate our desire to make the world a better place and to show that every person can make a difference to our world because all can choose to act with kindness.

Acts of kindness have a way of breaking barriers down. Our own parish has done a small act of kindness. We raised money for two boys in Afghanistan through a BBQ at Bunnings. I have gotten to know some Muslim students at university, and they went to Afghanistan recently and gave micro grants to 51 people to give them a hand up in memory of the 51 who died.

We have given our two boys Mateen and Raamiz a lift up as well. They will be able to establish business at the local market with our gift. Both of their fathers are addicted to heroin. Their fathers return home from time to time and harass the family. So, they cannot depend on them to provide food for the family.

Some surveys state that more than 3 million of the Afghan population are addicted to heroin. The war has left many people with internal scars which they try and cover with extreme drug use. The abused becomes the abuser to poor children like Mateen and Raamiz. These two young boys need to provide food for their family while being able to buy the things necessary to attend public school. They are very hopeful for their futures and they have expressed their hunger for a better life.

A small act of kindness yes but I like to think it makes a difference. They will know that a bunch of Christians on the other side of the world care enough to help them get a better start in life. With just \$800 we have broken down barriers of geography, race, and religion.

Jesus tells the woman in our Gospel that he will provide waters that do not run dry. This can seem strange indeed until we discover that the well of God's love never runs dry. In fact, the reverse happens: the more we share the waters of God's love the more there is to go around. Each act of kindness however small and seemingly insignificant results in an outpouring of love.

Following her conversation with Jesus, the woman at the well became the first Christian missionary. She went and told her whole village what she had discovered and many of them became followers of Jesus.

March 18 rather than a day to remember death and hatred can be an invitation to reach out to someone we wouldn't naturally come into contact with. Then we discover for ourselves the truth of Jesus' words, that the waters he gives us become in us an ever-flowing spring bubbling up to eternal life.

The Concorde was famous for breaking the sound barrier and Jesus for breaking social barriers. We too can break barriers. The barriers we like to build up around us come crashing down, so God's love can pour in.