

Reading: John 4:5-42

Loving God, in Jesus you satisfy our deep thirst. Help us to bring others to the well of your eternal life. In his name we ask it. Amen

On the census form this week I noticed a question about whether you have a tap with drinkable water. I realised how blessed we are in the vicarage we have no less than five taps inside with lovely fresh water. Sometimes it's easy to take our water for granted. If you have ever traveled overseas, you will know what I mean. They estimate in London eleven people have had a shower in the water before you drink it. It worries me that eleven people are having a shower together, but that's for another day.

Deep down in all of us are some very basic thirsts. I'm not talking about the physical thirst for water, that's important, but once we have that fulfilled then there are other thirsts which begin to kick in.

Bernard Levin in his book Life's Great Riddle, describes the thirst like this:

*Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet, and at times noisy, desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is hole inside them and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and TV sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it... it aches... it aches...*

There are four aches or thirsts which I believe dominate human nature whenever and wherever humans like you and me are found.

The thirst for purpose or meaning in our lives, the thirst for eternal life, the thirst for a moral code to guide our lives and the thirst for community or family to belong too.

Today's Gospel is remarkable on about twenty different levels all at once. Jesus is at Jacob's well. For countless generations this spot has provided water. Bishop David Coles once told us how a group he was with sat at that very spot. Then all of them drank from the well. Later, he said, they all had chronic diarrhea. Jesus is in gentile country and most remarkably he sits down in the middle of the day and talks with a gentile woman. In the society of Jesus' day a Jewish man would literally not be seen dead with a woman in public. They risked impurity, and gossip. They certainly would not have allowed a woman from Samaria to talk with them, and this woman was of dodgy morals having already had four husbands.

You can hear the desperation in the disciples' voices when they discover what he is up too. But Jesus does more than just talk, this isn't, "Nice day, what do you think about the weather?" This is a deep theological conversation. Jesus allows this woman to have her own opinion and he allows her to change his thinking too. In simple terms he treats her as

an equal. As a result she moves in her thinking, as he draws her from exclusion to inclusion. First she sees him as a man, then a prophet, then as the messiah. She becomes the very first missionary telling everyone else in her village about him.

It has to do with thirst. I believe that people thirst for purpose in their lives. The woman at the well found in Jesus a new purpose for her life. We can have all the material benefits of a first world country, flat screen TV's and all the rest of it, but if we have no purpose for our lives it's all so hollow, isn't it? Jesus, at the very deepest level, provides us with purpose and meaning for our lives. No longer are our lives all about us.

Jesus satisfies our need for a moral code. Sometimes called the golden rule - treat others as you would like to be treated, Jesus provides the moral code we need. Without a basic moral code, we become just economic units, and ripping one another off becomes the order of the day. Jesus satisfies our thirst for community. The church is the only organisation that has no limit on who can come in. We are made in the image of God, the Holy Trinity, to need others. The great infectious killer disease in our community is not covid or cancer but loneliness. So many have no family or, if they do, they are in Auckland or London. The family Jesus started, the church he cares for so deeply, is to provide family, for those without one.

Jesus satisfies our thirst for eternal life. "There has got to be more than just this." Someone who was dying said this to me. Jesus promises to the woman at the well a spring of water that will bubble up inside her and bring her to eternal life. Eternal life is what we are talking about when the priest says at the funeral: ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life...

Our first hymn today put it better than I can:

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
"Behold, I freely give  
the living water, thirsty one;  
stoop down and drink and live."  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
of that life-giving stream;  
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
and now I live in him.*