

8th March 2026. 3rd Sunday in Lent

Prayer for today: Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, John Gibson, Brenda Clark, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Graeme Common, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughead.

Among those who have died we remember Sheila Borthwick, and also Jack Reed, Robert Mason Pyle, Anthony Charlton Graham and Elizabeth Jane Hart, whose year's mind is about this time.

Lent Studies continue on Thursday at 2.30 p.m. at the home of Gwen Dixon, Bet Shalom, in Juniper. All are welcome.

Readings:

Romans 5: 1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of

sharing the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

⁶ While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. ⁸ But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.

Psalm 95

O come, let us sing unto the Lord:
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.
² Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.
³ For the Lord *is* a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand *are* the deep places of the earth:
the strength of the hills *is* his also.
⁵ The sea *is* his, and he made it:
and his hands formed the dry *land*.
⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down:
let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

⁷ For he *is* our God;
and we *are* the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
To day if ye will hear his voice,
⁸ harden not your heart, as in the provocation,
and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:
⁹ when your fathers tempted me,
proved me, and saw my work.
¹⁰ Forty years long was I grieved with *this* generation,
and said, It *is* a people that do err in their heart,
and they have not known my ways:
¹¹ unto whom I sware in my wrath
that they should not enter into my rest.

John 4: 5-42

⁵ Jesus came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

¹¹ 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'

¹³ Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

¹⁷ 'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

¹⁹ 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

²¹ 'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of

worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

²⁵ The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.'

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you – I am he.'

The disciples rejoin Jesus

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?' ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way towards him.

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.'

³² But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.'

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?'

³⁴ 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may

be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.'

Many Samaritans believe

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I've ever done.' ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'

Thoughts on today's reading:

This passage from St. John's Gospel is one of the most wonderful scenes in the Bible. It is full of life and detail, and its directness connects us to the protagonists in the story:

There is a saying, 'Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.' This scene opens at midday, outside a village, at a crossroads. The sun is unbearable: everyone is looking for a shady place for shelter from it; nobody is around; even the dogs are silent. In Judea, Jesus is associated with John the Baptist, who has been arrested, and will be executed; he might be next. It is not the Father's purpose that Jesus die in Herod's jail, so he returns to Galilee. Hot and thirsty, he waits by the well, outside the village. The women of the village will have come out a dawn, when it is still cool, to draw water. But

alone, and avoiding drawing attention to herself, one woman comes to the well in the heat of the day to draw water.

But what is this? a man, and a Jew at that, speaks to her, a woman and a Samaritan, and asks her for water. Already he has broken a tabu, not to mention that Jews would not use the same vessels for eating and drinking as Samaritans. No wonder his disciples are bemused, maybe even horrified, by what they find on their return. The initial exchange is unfriendly, yet as it continues it dawns on the woman that this man knows exactly who she is, and has not passed judgement on her, but rather asked her to do something for him: first of all for a drink, then to fetch her husband. She cannot make sense of everything Jesus has told her: 'When Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us,' she says. But when he says, 'I am he,' the penny drops, and she knows it must be true. No longer the outcast within her own village, she becomes Jesus' first apostle, his first missionary if you like, and goes off to tell everyone about him.

This story repays reflection and thought. What does Jesus do for the woman? On the face of it, nothing. There is no magic. He does not cause the water to come bubbling up from the well so that there is no need of the effort of filling a bucket. He does not amaze her with some supernatural sign. Rather he asks her for a drink, and then sends her off into the village. He knows her, but is not interested in passing judgement on her. He is vulnerable; thirsty, he asks for water – she has the bucket. He gives her a job, a mission - she is called, no less than Peter, James and John, to be his witness to her people. She has indeed received that living water in her encounter with Jesus, and has been born again- as a chosen apostle.

Here, in flesh and blood, is brought to life that declaration of St. Paul to Romans, that we are justified by faith, that we have peace

with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus, who replied to his critics, 'I have not come to call the respectable, but outcasts,' will be rejected by those who measure their righteousness by their observance of the Law – they think they have no need of him. He asks for water from the outcast and eats the bread of the rejected, and they receive his word and are saved. We cannot measure ourselves by how successfully or otherwise we keep to the rules: that is a form of slavery.

We have to measure ourselves by the cross: on the one hand it is the assurance of the extraordinary and infinite love of God for his creation, even when it has turned its back on him, but also the challenge of the invitation of Jesus to follow him. Can we, will we, leave behind our preoccupation with ourselves? Dare we liberate ourselves from our need to justify ourselves, our belief that we can save ourselves, that we can be autonomous? Will we love God with our heart, our mind, our soul, our strength?

In the woman at the well, in Saul who became Paul, I see a mirror held up to me. I see God who was not interested in condemning me but called me and gave me work to do. This is God who offered me freedom from self and openness to others, who gave me the water to drink and the bread to eat for that work, and has given me more than I could ever hope for.