

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent

During the seasons of Lent and Easter many of our gospel passages are taken from St John's Gospel. They are often long and like today they are often abridged or shortened. John's gospel is very, very different from Matthew, Mark and Luke focusing largely on the words of Jesus rather than his actions and recording the things he said, his teaching, conversations, discussions, debates. There are many passages in St John similar to today's gospel. St John is clear as to why he records these encounters and conversations of Jesus in such great detail. He states this clearly at the end of his gospel when he wrote, *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

In the encounter with the Samaritan woman which we have just listened to, Jesus is clearly inviting her to believe in him and turn to him for the water *"which will become a spring welling up to eternal life."* He is also inviting her to worship God not on the Samaritan holy mountain, Mt Gerizim, nor in Jerusalem but *"in spirit and in truth"* and he invites her to accept that he is the *"Messiah."* By recording a very long account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well at Sychar, St John is giving us a window into her journey in faith and the growth in her understanding of Jesus as the one sent by God, the Messiah. Her journey in faith is intended to encourage us in ours.

There is further encouragement in the rest of the story. St John then goes on to record how many others in the town came to faith. On hearing the woman's testimony, they ask Jesus, *"to stay with them, and he stayed two days."* During which time they came to believe in Jesus not because of what the woman said but because they heard him for themselves. The passage ends with them declaring that Jesus is *"indeed the Saviour of the world."*

In today's story of the Samaritan woman Jesus is presented as living water. Next Sunday we will listen to a similar, lengthy passage with a man born blind at the heart of it and Jesus presented as *"the light of the world"*. In two weeks' time, another lengthy but very familiar passage with the death of Lazarus at the heart of it and Jesus presented as *"the resurrection and the life."* Through all these passages we are invited *"to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"*, to deepen our faith and conviction, and come *"to have life in his name."*