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Sunday 12th March 2023

The Third Sunday of Lent

The Rev’d Dr Adam Scott

Call to Worship

We join together in the name of God: Creator, Christ and Comforter. **Amen.**

Jesus said: “… Those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.” **Give us that water! That we will never be thirsty again.**

*Based on John 4: 14 – 15 (GNT)*

Prayers of Approach

Come, let us praise God! Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!  
**Let us come before her with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise.**For the Lord is a mighty God, a mighty ruler over all the gods.  
**She rules over the whole earth, from the deepest caves to the highest hills.**She rules over the sea, which she made; the land also, which she formed.

**Come, let us bow down and worship God; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!**She is our God; we are the people she cares for, the flock for which she provides.

Listen today to what she says: **“Don't be stubborn, as your ancestors were at Meribah,  
as they were that day in the desert at Massah.**  
There they put me to the test and tried me, although they had seen what I did for them.  
**For forty years I was disgusted with those people.  
I said, ‘How disloyal they are! They refuse to obey my commands.’**  
I was angry and made a solemn promise: ‘You will never enter the land  
where I would have given you rest.’” **Amen.**

*Psalm 95: 1 – 7, gender changed to promote worshipful inclusion (GNT)*

Prayers of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

O God, our great shepherd, tenderly you gather us as lambs,

carrying us with your all-embracing love.

**Yet, like sheep, we wander from you;**

**often following our own ways, sometimes ignoring your voice,**

**at times distrusting your provisions.**

**Forgive our wrongdoing, our hardened hearts, our lack of trust.**

**Refresh us once again by your quiet waters of mercy**

**and restore our souls by your redeeming love.**

Guide our paths, that we might follow you more closely…

*Time of silent confession*

**Through Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, we pray.**

Receive the good news of the Gospel: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. **Amen.**

*The Worship Source Book (2nd edn.). Calvin Insitute of Christian Worship.*

All Age Activity

Give people drawing material and ask them to draw or describe God. Share the results!

Discuss if, at different points in your life, if the descriptions/drawings might have changed over time.

Readings

*Psalm 95* | *Exodus 17: 1 – 7* |St John 4: 4 – 42

Sermon Notes

*Psalm 95*

In this Psalm we are presented with the image of God as a regal shepherd who cares diligently for the people. This is followed with a clear call to the people to be obedient and remain faithful to their divine shepherd. In order to highlight this call the Psalmist reminds the people of the story of their ancestors’ rebellion towards God at Meribah and Massah (see Exodus 17: 1 – 7, & Numbers 20: 2 – 13).

*Exodus 17: 1 – 7*

This passage is part of the great story of the Jews’ liberation from slavery in Egypt. They have experienced many ‘signs and wonders’ in the preceding chapters –plagues, pillars of cloud and fire, the parting of the Red Sea, bitter water made sweet, and the provision of heavenly bread. Now they are faced with the prospect of having no water. The people’s grumbling has a sense that they are not just complaining, but actually bringing a lawsuit against Moses. He may have been frightened that they would stone him. It is important to recognise that in terms of the context, questioning Moses is seen as questioning God.

God’s response provides water from the rock. Moses names that place *Meribah* and *Massah*, which mean *Testing* and *Quarrel*. After this story God enables the people to win a decisive battle against Amalek. A similar story can be found in Numbers 20: 2 – 13, and references to it in other places in the Scriptures (i.e. Psalm 95). These other references suggest that the people will not get into the Promised Land because of their questioning of God at Meribah and Massah, although this thought is not contained in Exodus 17.

*St John 4: 4 – 42*

# It is not possible to summarise this passage completely and so I would suggest that you utilise a study bible and a good commentary (for example Sloyan’s ‘John: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching’). Like other places in John, the passage requires some close reading and the recognition of word play. The story happens towards the beginning of Jesus’ ministry siting alongside that of Nicodemus (John 3: 1 – 21). Notice some links between the passages – Nicodemus is part of the religious ingroup, the woman is a Samaritan; Nicodemus comes at night, the woman comes to Jesus in the middle of the day; Nicodemus does not understand who Jesus is, the woman recognises him as the Messiah.

The story in John 4 revolves around two conversations – one with the woman, and one with the disciples. Note that we are never told the woman’s name. What we know of her is that she is a Samaritan, these were a people group with a share history with the Jewish people, but ethically and religious different. The fact Jesus is in Samaria is a surprise as is the fact he is talking to a Samaritan woman. Jesus seems to be crossing several societal and religious taboos, something that his disciples become concerned about.

There is a sloppy reading of this passage which suggests that the woman is in some way sexually promiscuous. It is important to recognise the context of the day, and that without marriage the woman would have been destitute, and the fact she has so many husbands may not have been something within her control. It would be better to listen to the conversation she has with Jesus which is daring and full of theological depth. The woman challenges Jesus and quotes scripture to him, and ultimately recognises him as the Messiah (something Nicodemus failed to do). She then goes on to become the first evangelist recorded in the Gospel of John.

The disciples are scandalised when they see Jesus talking to the woman, but are unable to challenge him. Interestingly, they have a conversation with Jesus about food and completely fail to see that he is not actually talking about physical food, whilst Jesus and the woman spoke about water and she understands he is not talking about actual water!

An Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

*The Apostles Creed*

Offertory Prayer

Each will bring their offerings in different ways for the work of God, and with that in mind we pray the following prayer:

**Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things.  
Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts.**

**With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives**

**to the care of all that you have made,**

**for the sake of him who gave himself for us – Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*The Worship Source Book (2nd edn.). Calvin Insitute of Christian Worship.*

Intercession

Lord, as we journey towards Easter,

refresh, renew, restore us in your service.

We pray for churches where life has become dull and dry.

We remember churches struggling for survival.

We pray for Christians drained of energy and resources.

We remember especially those who thirst for your presence and your saving power.

Good and gracious Lord, **give us the water of life.**

We pray for all who thirst after justice,

all who are working hard to improve our world.

We remember all who are suffering from weariness and exhaustion.

We pray for all who live in place affected by drought.

Good and gracious Lord, **give us the water of life.**

We pray for all who are going through a period of testing and dryness,

in their faith or their relationships.

We pray for those whose ardour has cooled,

for all who have lost their first zeal and zest for life.

We pray for all who are suffering from a lack of love in their homes.

Good and gracious Lord, **give us the water of life.**

We remember all who feel wrung out or dried up,

all who are wearied with the journey of life,

all who feel they are near to perishing.

We pray for all who cannot cope by themselves,

for all who are in care, and for all carers.

We remember all who are in hospices.

Good and gracious Lord, **give us the water of life.**

We give thanks for the fellowship of those whose journey is over,

those who hunger and thirst no more,

all who have been refreshed and restored in your kingdom.

We pray that we may share with them in the fullness of life that is eternal.

Good and gracious Lord, **give us the water of life.**

We gather our prayers and praises into one by praying as Jesus taught us:

Our Father …

*adapted from Adam, D. (1998).*

*Clouds of Glory: Prayers for the Church Year A.*

*SPCK, pp.49 – 50.*

Blessing

Let us claim the freedom Christ gives to us by his self-giving on the Cross.

May he enable us to server together in faith, hope and love.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Christ, and Comforter,

go with you and all whom you love, and even your enemies.

Now and forever, Amen.

*The Worship Source Book (2nd edn.). Calvin Insitute of Christian Worship.*

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| Hymn Suggestions | | | | |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Uyai Mose, Tinamate Mwari |  |  | 22 |  |
| Be Still For The Presence of The Lord |  | 189 | 20 | 50 |
| Spirit of God, Unseen As The Wind |  | 600 | 394 | 1351 |
| Breathe On Me Breath of God | 295 | 596 | 370 | 67 |
| As The Deer Pants For The Water | 689 | 550 | 544 | 37 |
| As Pants The Hart |  | 32 |  |  |
| Listening God, You Hear When We Cannot Speak |  |  | 524 |  |
| Empty Broken Here I Stand |  |  | 421 |  |
| Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer | 345 | 167 | 465 | 201 |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*