

Sunday service



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 8th March 2026
The Third Sunday of Lent
The Revd Lisa Moore Wilson

Call to Worship

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods. Amen

Prayers Of Thanksgiving, Confession & Assurance

Gracious God,
we give thanks that through the ages
you have given us your prophets to guide us into your way of living.
We give thanks that you still call people to us that can teach us your word.
Most of all, we give thanks that you sent your Son among us
to be a living example of how to build our relationship with you
so that we can live life in its fullest sense.
Forgive us then, when we doubt,
when we want things to happen in the way we want
and to the time frame we want not yours.
Forgive us when we think our own ways are better than yours.
Forgive us when we fail to be honest with you and with ourselves.
Give us time to examine our thoughts and change our ways.

The Lord says: See, I am making all things new

Revelation 21:5

and

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

2 Corinthians 5:17

and

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself

2 Corinthians 5:19

Through him your sins are forgiven. The Lord also says:

If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Mark 8:34

From Words of Assurance in the URC Worship Book

Children's Activity

Have a range of drinks on display including a bottle/glass of water, some soft drinks and a mug/flask to symbolise a hot drink. Ask the children which drink they think is best for different situations e.g. on a cold day, after exercise etc. Draw the discussion to a close saying sometimes plain water is the best drink for us and explain that there is a story where Jesus was once very thirsty and asked a woman who was drawing water at a well for a drink. Go on to explain that Jesus then tells her about a very different kind of water – Living Water! Tell how he uses living water to explain that if we listen to Jesus teaching, we will always have God's love and help and it is like a very special kind of water that never, ever runs out.

Readings

Exodus 17 1-7 | St John 4 5-42

Sermon Notes

Exodus 17

The context of Moses providing, through God's power, water for a thirsty people is clearly a good reading to pair with a thirsty Jesus in our Gospel reading. The passage is another one of the grumbling stories where the newly freed people of Israel are struggling in the wilderness and wondering if servitude was better, or at least more secure. Freedom can be frightening and means we have to take responsibility. In the Exodus story the original freed people do not enter into the Promised Land due to their grumbling; internalised oppression is something that can take a generation to recover from after all. Preachers might be tempted to identify with Moses (ministers certainly will!) who, after all, doesn't resent the grumbling people of God; musicians who want different tunes to the ones carefully selected, readers who stumble over words because they not prepared, Elders asking awkward questions about the latest return from Church House, and the perennial "people are saying minister..." Perhaps this is a story, when paired with John, to think about our spiritual thirsts which can come out in grumbling when not fully addressed. Sometimes we displace what we're really unhappy about onto other things and other situations. The people of Israel were clearly worried about their security, deserts aren't very secure places after all. So grumbling about a lack of water might have been about something deeper. God through Moses provided for them just as God provides for the spiritual thirst of the Samaritan woman.

St John

The Lectionary starts at v5 but it makes more sense to start from the beginning of the chapter as it sets the scene. The editor of the Gospel makes the point that in coming to save the world Jesus is here evangelising a Samaritan. Samaritans were descendants of those not deported from the Northern Kingdom when it fell in 722 BCE and colonists from Babylonia and Media who settled there after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Inter-marriage would mean children from those marriages would not be completely racially Jewish. Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the Temple. Contrast the woman at the well at noon – in contrast to Nicodemus (whom we met last week) who comes at night! V22 has the Gospel's only totally positive claim about Jewish people "...salvation is from the Jews". The disciples express surprise Jesus is speaking with a woman, though he does on many other occasions. Many commentators fixate on the number of husbands the woman has had and assume she's sinful, or perceived as sinful, yet the text is silent on this. Don't be tempted to fill in details that aren't there! Jesus' question about her marital status is not about her sin, or lack thereof as she'd have no control over her marital status but to show his insight – the woman responds by recognising Jesus as a prophet. The disciples don't seem bothered by the fact she's Samaritan. Later she is depicted as a preacher who brings people to faith in Jesus. The discussion about the right place to worship had been one Jews and Samaritans had engaged in for hundreds of years at this point. The editor of John's Gospel has Jesus declare "I Am" announcing that he was the very presence of God there in her midst, rather side-stepping issues about where God should be worshipped. You might want to focus on a response here – the named, male, religious leader had a muted response to Jesus and, maybe through fear, came to him at night and after 7 verses goes back into the night. Whereas here the unnamed Samaritan woman, something of an outsider, responds to Jesus in the noon day light, discusses theology with him for some time and becomes an evangelist. How do we respond to our encounter with Jesus?

Weaving The Threads

What do we hunger and thirst for today? How do we displace our frustrations in life and in church? How might addressing our deepest spiritual hunger and thirst change things? Will we continue to grumble like the moaning people of God or respond with surprise and joy like our unnamed Samaritan woman?

Andy Braunston

Prayers of Intercession

You are invited to join in the following response:
God of transformation, **pour out your living water**

God we come before you today to pray for our imperfect world,
a world often convinced its ways are better than yours.

We pray for all those still affected by war and conflict,
we pray especially today for.....

We pray that our leaders and politicians may employ wisdom and discernment
rather than self-aggrandisement and territorial gains.

We pray that aid is able to reach those who need it
and that settlements are negotiated to allow justice and dignity for all

God of transformation, **pour out your living water**

We pray for your Church, your body on earth;
give us the energy and discipline
to let us still teach your Word to those who need to hear it.
Give us the strength to continue
when attitudes harden and when prayers seem unanswered.
Give us the encouragement not to become disillusioned
when change is happening more slowly than we would like.

God of transformation, **pour out your living water**

We pray for our families and community;
for those who are ill in mind, body or spirit,
for those who are lonely, anxious or worried,
and for those who are grieving.

In a moment of silence we name these people before you

Silence

God of transformation, **pour out your living water**

We join all our prayers together as Jesus,
source of our living water, taught us saying, Our Father...

Offertory

In today's service we have been thinking about both physical water and spiritual water
so let us give thanks for both.

God, we bring our offering to you today
knowing that you accept us just as we are,
providing for our physical and spiritual welfare.

May these offerings be used to help

those who need of fresh water
 and those who have still not tasted your Living Water.
 In Jesus' name we ask this. Amen.

Blessing

Go knowing you have drunk living water
 and go out to pour that living water for those who are still thirsty
 in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Let All the World In Every Corner Sing	114	122	57	404
Rejoice the Lord is King	657	449	335	575
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say	349	540	248	275
All My Hope on God is Founded	586	192	455	16
Guide me O Thy Great Redeemer	345	167	465	201
Great is thy Faithfulness	96	153	51	200
For the healing of the nations	620	706	696	
I the Lord of Sea and Sky		251	663	
Just as I am without one plea	364	553	556	396
The King of Love my Shepherd Is	552	462	479	694
In my life Lord be glorified	375			335
All Who Are Thirsty				1025
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken	560	738	748	173
Jesus Lover of My Soul	332	490	355	372
Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing	360		494	

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