

Orphir & Stenness Church
Sunday 12th March 2023; Lent 3A; Holy Communion
Transcript

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning. Welcome to our worship.
Wherever you have come from today,
whether you come here regularly, or occasionally,
and especially if you are here for the first time,
your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Today we read about a conversation at a well. Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman about 'living water', and many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. We ask ourselves. what does it mean to us today, to accept, and be accepted, and to drink from the well of living water?
We also celebrate Holy Communion.

As we begin our service, let us take a few moments to feel the worries and stress of the last week slip away, and open ourselves to the presence of God among us.

Gathering prayer:

Lord, we are drawn to your well, and to your table, seeking the bread, the wine, the water of eternal life. Refresh us with your Word. Surround us with your Love. Fill us with your Spirit, that we may never be thirsty. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. (Psalm 95:1)

Let us worship God:

Hymn 59 (1) Tune Irish; (Psalm 95) O come, and let us to the Lord in songs our voices raise

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. (Ps 95)

Prayer of approach: Let us pray:

Sometimes we turn up here, tired after a busy week,
our minds, bodies and souls aching for refreshment.
Jesus came to a well, tired from his journey,
seeking to receive refreshment, seeking to give spiritual renewal.
We too want to receive, and to give.
We offer ourselves to him so that he can use us for his purposes in this place.

The woman recognised Jesus for who he really is.
The Samaritans heard that Jesus is the saviour of the world.
They heard, and believed.
May we realise today that he knows *us*, has always known us,
through and through;
hear anew that he is our Saviour, marvel at his amazing love and acceptance.

The woman at the well saw that Jesus knew her, warts and all.
We come now to Jesus, aware, acknowledging, the times we have failed him,
unintentionally, or sometimes deliberately,
thinking we can fool him about the less public parts of our lives,
about the state of our hearts.

May we learn to stop trying to get God to do what we want
and understand what he wants us to do for him.
May we know his pardoning grace.
In him is the spring of water that wells up to eternal life.
As they were for the Samaritan woman,
the love and forgiveness of God are freely there for the taking.

As we look towards a new week, may God help us to realise that life
can be expanded beyond our wildest dreams.
May we look upon others as Jesus looks upon them;
see them as he sees them, that they in turn, may see in us, and in our lives,
a reflection of his love, the love that will not let us go.
May we all hear again for ourselves, and know,
that this is truly the Saviour of the world.
In his name we ask. Amen.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: *Peter will read for us today:*

John 4: 5-42: (*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*)

[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn 540: I heard the voice of Jesus say 'Come unto me and rest ..'

Message:

A long reading from John's Gospel today, yet it has the feel of a condensed story: maybe a summary of a longer conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Lots of lessons for us here: racial prejudice - the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans; the position of women in society; the symbolism of water, and 'living water'; and Jesus's disclosure that he is the Messiah.

Picture the scene. Samaria; about noon, the hottest part of the day; Jesus, tired out by his journey, sitting by Jacob's well, a historic site - I believe the well still exists. Remember the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, a complicated story dating back generations, to the invasion of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, and subsequent intermarriage of the Samaritans with incoming foreigners, so that they lost their racial purity, lost their right to be called Jews. On the other hand, in the southern kingdom, despite the invasion by the Babylonians, the Jews still managed to keep their racial purity. When eventually they returned to from exile, their first job was to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. The Samaritans offered to help, but were contemptuously told that their help was not wanted, so they took themselves off to their rival temple on Mount Gerizim, later attacked and destroyed by the Jews. Much more complicated than that, but the basis for the bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

I am reminded of much less serious, but nevertheless damaging, animosities I have known between one church and another, the big church and the small church, north church and south church and so on.

Remember too the status of women in these times: no rights; the property of father or brother or husband. Remember the position with divorce. A man could divorce his wife on the smallest pretext, such as spoiling his meal, or answering back when he criticised her. To make a divorce effective, all he had to do was to call a male witness, and write out the dismissal notice. On the other hand, it was almost impossible for a woman to divorce her husband.

A divorced woman, unless she had independent means, lost all status and value in the community: a rejected woman; a disgrace. Her own family would refuse to take her back. Her existence became precarious. Her options were work as a servant, marry again very quickly, become some man's mistress, work as a prostitute, or starve.

Background. Now picture a Samaritan woman coming to the well in the heat of high noon, when sensible people would be either indoors or sheltering in the shade somewhere. She came at this time because she didn't want to be seen. She meets a Jew, a stranger, at the well, and

astonishingly, he speaks to her – indeed he asks her for a drink. Remember - Jesus was a Rabbi: a Rabbi was not allowed to speak to a woman in public – not even his wife or daughter or sister. Here is Jesus breaking down all sorts of barriers – race, culture, gender. John shows us his humanity – his exhaustion in the heat of the day; his sympathetic openness that allowed the woman to talk to him. Here is Jesus extending the love of God.

The woman is suspicious: *"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"*

Maybe this is only a summary of a long conversation, but I think Jesus put two and two together and summed up the woman's situation very accurately. Traditionally, this woman is portrayed as a promiscuous outcast, and most commentators see her like that. *But the Bible doesn't say that.* Maybe she was infertile, and divorced for that reason. Maybe her first husband had died, and, following the Levirate marriage law, her next husbands could have been brothers through whom she was supposed to produce an heir. Or remember what I said about divorce.

This woman is not a sinner; she's a victim: used, and abused, and discarded five times by a succession of men, and now the guy she's with doesn't have the decency to marry her.

Having given her some dignity, Jesus offers her something: the riddle of the living water. Differences in language here don't come over in translation. For the Jews, *'living water'* meant fresh, running, clear water from a spring or a burn, rather than the still, maybe stagnant, water from a deep well. Jesus's words are meant to be taken in a spiritual sense, but the woman takes them literally: *"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well?"* When Jesus explains that what he offers is *"a spring of water gushing up to eternal life"*, she says, *"Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."*

Here, Jesus seems to change the subject, but in fact he is opening up the sad story of her life, its many rejections, and her ongoing misery: *"Away and fetch your husband and come back"*. Honestly, openly, she responds with the truth. *"I have no husband."*

How you and I react to what follows depends on how we picture Jesus at this moment. Do we see him wagging a reproving finger at a wicked woman, or responding in compassion to her honesty? I like to picture Jesus quietly looking at her with love and respect: *"Aye, that's true: ye're haen five husbands and the one ye hae noo isna yer husband."*

Five husbands have divorced you, and the man with whom you are living at this moment is not your husband.

It's scary to have someone see right through you and get personal about your private hurts. The woman gets a bit alarmed; tries to change the subject. She fastens on to the differences between Samaritan and Jewish religious beliefs, but Jesus gently brings her back. Dear woman, never mind about this mountain or that mountain. **God is not confined to one place or one system of religious beliefs.** *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"*.

Words for us here too, in times of change within the church.

The woman can't see what Jesus is getting at, so she hangs on to her belief that, when God sends the Messiah, all will be made clear:

"I know that Messiah is coming ... When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us."

Jesus's reply: gentle; firm:

"I am he—I, the one talking to you." (New Century Version)

The Samaritan woman was the first person recorded in the Gospel of John to whom Jesus revealed himself as Messiah, and this is the first "I am" statement in the gospel as well.

Just then the disciples return from the village. They are surprised, embarrassed, awkward, to find Jesus talking to this woman. Maybe, as early converts, they saw themselves a cut above the other outsiders whom Christ came to seek and save; maybe a bit smug and self-righteous. Could we be like that: uncomfortable whenever Christ includes outsiders, and invites them to sit at his table, eat the same bread, drink for the same cup?

Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. Left her jug: she knew she was coming back. Went specifically to call other people to Jesus. This scorned woman, who an hour before slipped out of the town like a moral leper in order to draw water from the well, returns as a Christian evangelist with the confidence to preach to the people who had despised her.

Jesus had restored her self-respect. And:

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, ... came to him, asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word.

Any place, any time: but particularly *this church, at this time*, is like that well in Samaria.

Here we find the Messiah waiting for us with living water; waiting with a wondrous, inclusive, healing love. Christ is here among us, now, offering us renewal in spirit and truth. Christ is here, inviting us to his Table. Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

During this next hymn, please bring the Offering to the front.

Offering Hymn 722: Spirit of God, come dwell within me (fill me with living water)

Dedication of Offering

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, all things belong to you, and all that we have comes from you. If we have gifts to bring, it is of your free mercy. Accept these our offerings, and grant that they may be hallowed by your blessing, and used in your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing the Peace:

This is a house of God. A place of peace.

A place where we befriend one another.]

Before we come to the Lord's Table, let us greet one another as a sign of God's peace and of our shared fellowship.

Invitation to Communion:

If you know why you have come here today, or if you don't, come to the table anyway.

If you understand what this is all about, or if you struggle to understand faith, come to the table anyway.

If you are certain about God, or if you wonder more now than ever before, come to the table anyway.

If you seek forgiveness, or if you are not yet ready for that, come to the table anyway.

If you are sure of who you are, or if you are not, come to the table anyway.

If you know you are meant to be here, or if you hesitate, come to the table anyway.

This table is open to all, for it is the Lord's table.

You are all invited to be yourself,
and know that it is Jesus himself who invites you.

During the next hymn, individual pieces of bread and vials of wine will be distributed. Please keep them, and at the appropriate time we will eat the bread together, and, after a pause, drink the wine together.

To take us into communion, let us sing:

Hymn 553 Just as I am, without one plea

The Grace:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. *Amen.*

The Story of the Last Supper

Taking of the Bread and Wine

In the prayer that follows I invite you to join in the responses (on Link)

As the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,
I take these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses
to this holy use and mystery;
and as he gave thanks and blessed, let us draw near to God
and offer him our prayers and thanksgiving.

Let us pray.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Intercession and Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise. (From BCO3 + Proper Preface for Lent*)

And now we give thanks that, Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience through suffering,
and is able to help those who are in the midst of their trial to overcome evil and grow in grace.

Therefore, Living God, with your people of all places and times,
and with the whole company of heaven, we proclaim your greatness
and sing your praise in the angels' song:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We bless you for his holy birth, his perfect life on earth,
for his suffering for us and his triumph over death;
for his ascension to your right hand and his gift of the Holy Spirit;
and for the promise of his coming again.

Remembering his work and passion,
and pleading his eternal sacrifice,
we follow his example and obey his command.
who on the night of his arrest took bread,

and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said:
'This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me'.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said:
'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me'.

Send down your Holy Spirit to bless us and these your gifts of bread and wine,
that the bread which we break may be for us the communion of the body of Christ,
and the cup of blessing which we bless, the communion of the blood of Christ;
that we, receiving them, by faith may be made partakers of his body and blood,
with all his benefits, to nourish us and help us grow in grace,
to the glory of your most holy name.

And here we offer and present to you our very selves,
to be a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for your acceptance;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours,
almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.***

Remember, O Lord,
your holy Church throughout the world and reveal your glory among the nations.
Save your people, and bless those who belong to you, shepherd them and carry them for ever.

Remember, O Lord,
our families and friends, and surround them with your steadfast love. (BCO3*)

We pray for places that suffer constant drought,
places where people have to walk miles for water;
places where there *is* no wholesome fresh water;
for all those on the margins of society.
Open our eyes and our ears to their need.

Be close to all who are ill, who suffer pain, or loneliness, or grief,
those who draw near to death, those who worry about them, who care for them,
and for those whom we carry in our hearts today. . .

Pause

Comfort them with your presence, sustain them by your promises, grant them your peace.

And now, rejoicing in the communion of the saints, we remember with thanksgiving
all your faithful servants, and those dear to us, who serve you in the glory of heaven.
Keep us in unbroken fellowship with your whole Church in heaven and on earth,
and bring us at the last to the joy of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:
*Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Breaking of Bread

According to the holy institution, example,
and command of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and as a memorial of him,
we do this:
who, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread
and when he had given thanks, he broke it
and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you;
do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup saying,
'This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.'

Communion

Take, eat. This is the body of Christ which is broken for you.
Do this, remembering him.

The body of Christ, given for you.

This cup is the new covenant sealed by Christ's blood
which was shed that the sins of many might be forgiven. Drink from it, all of you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

The Peace

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. *Amen.*

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray.

Here we have tasted the things of this world.
Here we have touched the things of the next.
Here we have seen and heard of the great mystery of our salvation.
Here we have eaten of one loaf, and drunk of one cup,
in that communion becoming one with you, with our brothers and sisters near and far,
and with that great cloud of witnesses which surrounds us.
May this precious gift which we have received be shared with all whose lives we touch,
that our love of you, and your love in us may shine for the salvation of the world. Amen.

Hymn 5: 667 Now, my tongue, the mystery telling (Tune Triumph 706)

Dismissal and Blessing

The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus;
and may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and abide with you always. Amen. (BCO 3*)

Doxology:(Hy. 786)

May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place;
May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.

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**Church of Scotland Book of Common Order, Communion No.3 + Proper Preface for Lent)*