

Service: Live-stream Morning Worship
Date: 22nd March 2020
Preacher: Rev. Carl Smith
Series: Lent - Encounters With Jesus
Title: Encounter With A Samaritan Woman
Passage: John 4:1-26

This is the passage that we had set for today as part of our Lent series looking at encounters with Jesus. And part of me was in two minds about whether to change it in order to speak about something that's more relevant to what's going on but for a number of reasons I decided to stay with this passage. Firstly, I absolutely love this passage, it's a wonderful story of an encounter with Jesus. Secondly, it's easy to forget at the moment but we are still in Lent and so we want to continue with our series looking at the encounters that people had with Jesus. And then thirdly it also speaks really well into the situation we're facing today as individuals, as a church, as a nation, and as a world.

This is a great passage, the story of the woman at the well in John 4 and there's a wonderful story about this that is a perfect lesson in the importance of proofreading before a wedding. There was a couple who for their wedding wanted the wonderful passage from 1 John 4:18 which is that famous verse "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear". A great choice for a wedding and actually a great choice for today as well. But there was a slight typing error in the email communication between the couple and the person who was going to do the reading on the day and they missed out the "1". So on the day of the wedding comes John 4:18 which says "you're right when you say you have no husband, you have five husbands and the one you currently have is not your own". So the importance of proofreading there. But this is a really well-known story in John's Gospel. It's a wonderful encounter that Jesus has with this woman at the well and I think this is actually one of the first passages I ever preached on as a worship pastor back in the day. It is a passage you come back to time and time again when talking about worship because of the verses 20 to 24 where Jesus is talking about worshipping in spirit and in truth. And I think that's really important for us today as we gather for the first time as virtual church something we've never done before here at St. Mary's and St. Mark's. As we're not able to gather in the way that we might perhaps like to or the way we'd wish to it gives us an opportunity to make sure that our worship is worship that is "in spirit and in truth" and doesn't rely on the gathering together. Now the gathering together is still important, it's an important aspect of our worship we are a people made to be in community. We've said before that the first thing that God said was not good in creation was when he said "it's not good for man to be alone". We were made to be in community and we're in a season now where we're having to rethink and reimagine what being in community looks like and how we do that and in a creative way.

But worship, that gathered worship, whilst it's a wonderful gift to

us is not worship alone. It's not reliant on us gathering in together because worship is about our whole lives being turned over to Jesus, being sold out for Jesus in everything we do and in how we live our lives. As Paul says in Romans 12 that's our spiritual act of worship, to offer ourselves over to Jesus and when we gather in worship it should fuel the worship of the rest of our lives. So even though we're not able to gather right now, worship does not cease in our lives. We do not cease to worship God but rather we are understanding more in this season than ever before what it means to worship in spirit and in truth. And particularly to worship in truth. Because for me to worship in truth is to worship with integrity and that means to come as we truly are. With all our feelings and thoughts and emotions of this time. To come as we are before Jesus knowing he accepts us as we are and to give him whatever we can bring him. And to do that truthfully means at times like this perhaps to even admit that we're struggling to do that, to be able to say "Jesus, you know what, this is hard right now, worship is not something that I feel like doing right now with everything that's going on."

There are times that you will feel worship is the only thing we have and there'll be other times where worship is a response to something amazing, which we'll come to in a minute. But there will be times where worship is a sacrificial choice to say "I'm going to choose to worship today, regardless of how I'm feeling" and that is worship in spirit and in truth and it doesn't rely on us gathering. So in this season where we're not able to gather how we normally would we can still worship in spirit and in truth.

And I want to think about the encounter because that's what we've been doing over the past few weeks. We've been thinking about how these encounters with Jesus change the lives of people around him and here we have this woman who approaches Jesus, who's waiting at the well for her, and they have a dialogue and a conversation which the passage makes it clear is a dialogue you wouldn't normally expect to see. Here is Jesus paying attention to this woman in a way that nobody else ever has before and what he shows here is incredible hospitality in the true sense of the word. We've said before at St. Mary's and St. Mark's that hospitality is not simply the ability to make a good cup of tea, as important as that is, but true hospitality is the ability to make the person you are with feel like the most important person in the world in that moment. And that's what Jesus is doing here with this woman. She knows she's valued by Jesus and they have this incredible dialogue and conversation, talking about religious history, talking about their different styles of worship, talking about their different backgrounds and lifestyles, getting to know each other fairly well. And Jesus speaks prophetically into her life, he makes it very clear that he knows her very well, he knows what's going on in her life. She sees that he's a prophet but also sees that he's something more than that as well. The offers that Jesus makes of living water and drinking from that well in in a way that nobody else really has understood before and then the woman's life is transformed by this encounter as she realises that Jesus is the Messiah, he is the

chosen one, as he says those words "I who am speaking to you am he" and then she runs to her village, she leaves behind what she came for, she leaves the jar behind and she runs to the village and she tells all her village people the people around her "I've seen the Messiah, I've seen Jesus" and she doesn't do anything particularly to convince them, she says just one simple sentence "come and see" and so they gather around, they come, they flock to see Jesus and then they invite Jesus back to stay with them and he goes out of his way to stay with them for two whole days. Now Jesus was on his way from one place to another and probably had an idea of when he'd like to get there but he goes out of his way to spend two days with these people and because they spend so much time with him they get to know him really well and he gets to know them really well. He probably shows incredible hospitality to them as well and then all of them or a huge number of them have seen Jesus, encountered Jesus, and their lives are changed as well because they've met him, not because the woman told them that he was the Messiah but because they met him, they encountered him, and their lives were changed.

I genuinely believe we are living in a time where our need for Jesus has been highlighted more than ever before and I read this quote a couple of weeks ago and I make no apology for reading it again because I just think it's so important in this season. It comes from John Eldridge and he says this "we need Jesus like we need oxygen, like we need water, like the branch needs the vine, Jesus is not merely a figure for religious devotion he is the missing essence of your existence" whether we know it or not we are desperate for Jesus. Now we can't in this time do anything to persuade people that they need Jesus but what we can do in this time is say "come and see, come and see what he's done for my life, come and see what he's done in our lives", come and see how our hope is fixed not in the circumstances around us but in the person of Jesus Christ, come and see who he is, discover him for yourself because we need him the reality. And the truth is we need him. I genuinely believe that one of the greatest witnesses to the world is a Christian who is able to cling onto Jesus in the midst of suffering. And where you see the church growing more than ever before are the places where persecution is rife, where people are choosing Jesus even in the midst of their suffering. There's a great quote that says "how do you know a tree is an evergreen tree? You wait for winter and see what it does". And we are in a season of winter and this is an opportunity for us as a church to show that Jesus makes a difference, that he is the alleviation of our fear, that he is the reason for our hope, our peace, our joy even in the midst of suffering. That doesn't mean that we ignore the problems around us, that we ignore the coronavirus. It doesn't mean that it won't affect us necessarily, it doesn't mean that it's not going to have an impact on our lives but it means that in the face of it, whatever happens, still we have Jesus. We've often said on Remembrance Day that the gift of peace is not the absence of war, is not the absence of suffering but is the presence of the person of Jesus Christ. Everything we need is found in Jesus. It's not a quip sentence or something that Christians just say, it's an absolute truth that we've discovered I cannot bear the thought of facing this

season without Jesus. You know there's been times this week I've had major questions, I've had huge questions to ask and haven't necessarily had the answers but even in those times, when it's been so hard, I have been so so thankful for Jesus, so thankful that I have him as a sure and certain hope, so thankful that I have him present in my life. He is my lifeblood right now and when all else fails, he is who I can cling to, he is who I can put my hope and my trust in because he's the promise maker and the promise keeper and so I can trust, not only in him but also in his promises made to us and all of my worship is a response to that, is a response to who Jesus is even in the midst of suffering. The reality is that every single one of you watching online right now, you matter to Jesus, you really matter to him and he wants to show you incredible hospitality by making you realise that when you spend time with him you are the most important thing in the world to him right that moment. And it's amazing that he can do that for everyone all the time and you may be sitting here this morning thinking, actually "no, I don't feel like that, why would I be important to Jesus, why would I be important to God". Well Jesus is the proof that you are important to God because he said that he loves the whole world that he sent his one and only Son, there's no exception to that. It wasn't that he loved the whole world but not you, he loved the whole world and so he sent Jesus for you.

At the beginning of our Lent season at St. Mary's and St. Mark's we encouraged you to read the Gospel of Mark and to try to seek to find an encounter with Jesus through it, that every time you read the gospel you say "Jesus, show me who you are. Holy Spirit reveal to me who Jesus really is" and I want to finish with that, that prayer of Holy Spirit because this is an important time for us to, as well as getting to know Jesus, also getting to know the person of the Holy Spirit better than we've ever known him before because he is the source of our joy, our hope, our future, our freedom, our life and he is the one who shows us who Jesus really is. And so our prayer is "Holy Spirit, in this season of questions, in this time of uncertainty, we pray, Holy Spirit, would you show us who Jesus really is, would you give us our own fresh encounter with Jesus in this season. May we realise that he is the very reason we live and breathe and have our being and may our hope, our peace, our joy, our future, our salvation be found in him and in him alone and where we've placed that trust in other things, we choose today to place that trust in you".

And you may be watching this morning and you maybe don't know Jesus and I want to encourage you, get to know him, read what the Bible says about Jesus and just ask that question "if everything that Jesus says is true, if everything that's said about Jesus is true, what difference would that make to my life right now in the midst of this suffering, what would it look like to have an encounter with Jesus this season". And so we pray for you, we bless you in the name of Jesus, we pray that you would encounter him and know that you matter to him right now, you matter to him and as you encounter him, may you encourage others to come and see who he is. Amen