

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 15 March 2020

Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42

Let's have a brief reflection on Christchurch shooting before we begin. We know that Friday 15 March 2019, two consecutive terrorist shooting attacks occurred at mosques in Christchurch – one at Al Noor Mosque and the other at Linwood Islamic Centre. It was during Friday Prayer. The attacks killed more than 50 people, and many others were injured. At that time, I was involved in school chaplaincy, and I was working with Syrian refugee girls closely. They came to New Zealand as refugees for a secure and peaceful life after they had to leave their war-torn country. Most of them attended Al Huda Mosque in Dunedin, which was reportedly the initial target by the gunman. It was not easy to see these girls who seemed to endure quietly after such loss of friends and relatives by the attacks.

We may never get a crystal-clear answer from the gunman why he had to do what he did. But it has made us realize that love will win in the end because people from different communities tried to share the sufferings and pains of the Muslim community. May God help the Muslim community overcome evil through forgiveness, and may God help us continue to live by loving others that we have received through Christ. So let us pray.

Send your Spirit among us, O God, as we meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Prepare our minds to hear your Word. Move our hearts to accept what we hear. Purify our will to obey in joy and faith. Prepare our hearts and minds to be transformed into the water of life of which the source is Jesus Christ. This we pray through Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

As usual, the copies of the sermon will be found on the table in the foyer as you go out.

Do you remember what we explored last week? ... In the first week of Lent, we talked about 'trial or temptation?' Last week was about 'faith in God; from below or from above?' We learned that the faith we have is from above as we were born of water and the Spirit when we baptized in Christ. This week, we will go into this theme - *Water of life – where do we find it?* The possible ready-made answer maybe this - 'from the most unlikely place!' So first, we'll see where Israel found water in the wilderness. It will lead us to a Samaritan woman who found the water of life during the conversation with Jesus. And then it will be time to think about ourselves about the water of life in us.

1. The water of life in Moses and Israel

Exodus 17:1 begins like this under the title, 'Water from the Rock.' 'From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink...'

Whenever we read novels or seeing movies, we may notice that the first scenes or descriptions are vital. They give us not only the context, but they also introduce characters/people. But more importantly, they will provide us with some hints or clues about what would happen next. In this verse, we hear these words: the wilderness, journey, camp, the Lord, command, and lastly no water for people to drink.

Put it simply, the guaranteed life supports of the Egyptian empire are missing in the wilderness. When they were living in Egypt, they may not have had any dignity or freedom, but they had a steady supply of food and water in exchange for servitude. Now out of the empire, they have faced the harsh reality – no water to drink. The wilderness does not only portray the lack of essential resources that they need but also their lack of faith in God. As such, in the leanness of wilderness faith, Israel's need and thirst and yearning lead to restlessness and an outcry against the leadership of Moses. Israel is plunged into crisis. People protest and try to assault Moses.

So Moses cries out to the Lord, and God listens to him. A command and a promise are issued. God gives no explanation, no supportive argument. The command is terse and nonnegotiable. It requires Moses to act in ways that appear ludicrous. Along with the elders, Moses is to strike a rock - the most unlikely place. If it doesn't work, he may be killed by this angry mob. But before he strikes the rock, Moses has to overcome his fear for life. And he has to trust God at all cost. Then the water flows. The contrast between hard rock and flowing water makes us amazed. Moses begins to understand that he has also received the water of life through the faith in God. Then, what about the woman at the well?

2. The water of life in the Samaritan woman

In John 4:11 reads, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" It is a question that the Samaritan woman asks Jesus. The context where this conversation is happening resembles the one where Israel was in the wilderness. It is about life to continue where obtaining water is crucial. This time, however, it is not about water to

sustain one's physical being, but living water/the water of life that will sustain eternal life. But to get this 'living water', as Moses did, this woman has to put her faith in Jesus whose words open the entirely new understanding about life to her. Indeed, this conversation is happening between the most unlikely people, e.g. a male Jew and a Samaritan woman; at the most unlikely hour to fetch water – it is about noon, and at the most unlikely place – Jacob's well before the presence of water. At the end of the story, we are informed that the woman left her water jar and went back to the city (4:28). The encounter with the water of life has made her forget about her reason to come to the well. It shows that she has indeed received the water of life. By the time she tells about Jesus – the Messiah to her village people, the living water now begins to flow through her to others.

In this story, we see that Jesus' radical revelation transcends stigmas of sexism and racism while serving as an invitation to *all who believe in him* to drink of the living water. He also alters the understood direction of divine relationship. It is no longer a question of worshippers seeking God, but of God seeking people who will worship him in the way God wants, 'in spirit and truth.' We see this same pattern from the interaction between God and Moses also. So what now - what about us?

3. The water of life in us

Let's look around us. Who do we see? We have seen these lovely faces for many years. What brings us to sit here and listen to these same stories again? Although we have heard about them many times, they still make us fascinated. It is because these stories inform us how we are all called to live. They keep telling us that we are called to do exactly what Jesus did - live one's faith and love of God wherever we go. It also informs us that God is always ahead of us and while waiting for us to make this life journey together. When we truly immerse ourselves in this living water, then we will know what it means to live like Jesus Christ.

Lent concerns the liturgical, spiritual, socioeconomic act of leaving the guarantees of the dominant ordering of social power and coming to terms with the commands and promises of God. As in Exodus, we would prefer to challenge God to come to our terms. The response of God in this narrative is only a terse command, a lean promise, and life at the last minute. Like the Samaritan woman at the well shows, we have to acknowledge that it is God who is always seeking us first, not the other way round. Those who receive the water of life through Jesus Christ cannot but continue to live the same life as Jesus did. If so, we are able to let this water

of life flows to those so that they may also receive this living water for eternal life. For this we are called by God. Amen.