

**John 4 5:42 & Walking the Way of Cross Station 11 – Stephen Cottrell Reflection**

Through the love of God and our salvation in Jesus Christ may our hearts be opened, and the Spirit guide us, so we receive Gods word today. Amen

I can imagine the Samaritan women journeying to Jacobs Well in the heat of the middle of the day. I see her sauntering towards the well, carrying her jar, to collect her water and her surprise at seeing this Jewish man sat there, resting. Perhaps she wondered why he had gone through Samaria, and not through the Jordan Valley to avoid being attacked. I imagine it was an intrusion on her daily routine. Perhaps it could have been a welcome one. To me she seems lonely. It is her time away from her village and the people in it who she is clearly trying to avoid. Most of the other women would have come earlier or later when it was cooler. I can imagine it was a place where women met not only to do the practical exercise of drawing water but to meet their friends, to have a chat and a gossip before they went about their daily lives.

But not our Samaritan women, she did not join them. By all accounts she was an outsider. She was different from the rest of the women. She was clearly not shy. She seemed to happily engage in conversation with a man, which was not the done thing at that time and especially a Jewish man. We all know the Samaritans hatred for the Jewish people. A hatred that was returned in equal measure by the Jews who consider all Samaritans as outcasts. She questioned what Jesus was saying and seemed to have no issues with finding a husband. Although it seems as though she could not keep them! What is indicated is that she has chosen a certain way of life that is not the convention for the time and her choices have kept her away from the rest of the women.

I sometimes consider myself as an outsider, my friends were all similar and I guess you could say we were drawn to each other by our differences. As a young women I was not happy to go along with convention and neither were my friends. Because of this I can see myself and my friends in this woman. Not that any of us had 5 five husbands mind you! But sometimes I think we can all feel like an outsider. We can all feel far from God.

Can you imagine what it is like for someone walking into our church for the first time? To come in to the body of the church and integrate themselves with the rest of us. It's not easy. I remember the first time I walked through those North Porch doors. I was absolutely petrified! I had also been doing

the Alpha course and knew one or two people but it was very daunting! Thankfully John Ainsley took me under his wing and I got through the service and felt great! Afterwards Elizabeth tried to get me to stay for coffee and I remember thinking no way! Being a bit shy I could not have interrupted people and force my way into their conversations!

At some point in our lives we all feel like outsiders, even amongst our friends, and particularly at the moment when, because of the coronavirus, we are forced to change our habits and keep our distance from people. This can make us feel anxious and lonely. In normal times, though to be honest, it is our choices that keep us on the outside and can keep us from God and community.

Accepting Christ's love is not always easy, especially at the moment, but we have to maintain our faith, we have to change direction and make a commitment to God. We have to love in return. Fr Jeremy said in a sermon before lent that you have to love everyone, you may not like them, but you have to love them. Easier said than done. But repentance is the beginning of the journey and remembering to recognise Christ everyday leads to his living water, to love, the kingdom and eternal life.

This is hard right now as we are living in such an uncertain times. I find reciting Psalm 121, some say the soldiers Psalm, helps me to centre myself.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains,  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip  
he who watches over you will not slumber.  
Indeed he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber or sleep

and so on

Remember, Jesus accepts all of us, wherever we are. Even those on the outside and he welcomes his lost sheep home, like the penitent thief, the Samaritan women and the Samaritan villagers who convert later that day.

But back to the Samaritan women. I find it amazing how quickly the Samaritan women changed her direction. Can you imagine the magnetism of Jesus on that day? We are told he needed to rest so he must have been tired, weary from his journey and healings, yet there was something about him that the Samaritan women must have noticed. He told her that he is the Messiah, the one she is waiting for. She hears him as he talks about her life and offers her living water. Not the stagnant water she draws from the well but water that is so pure and powerful that it will change every area of your life. Then it hits her like a thunderbolt. It is her moment of revelation. The lost sheep has returned to God and she proclaims this good news to the village. The same ones she avoided earlier in the day.

Jesus has living water for all of us, living water in the Spirit but we need to accept him and his teaching. This means we need to repent. We need to change direction. We need to maintain our faith.

Some have probably had a thunderbolt moment but many probably not. But that does not matter. What matters is that we recognise through our faith that we are changing. And we are changing for the better and making ourselves ready for God's kingdom. We can feel the presence of Christ in the service today, in his word, in hymns and in the living food he gives us at the Eucharist. We can open our hearts and listen for his word. We can be what God wants us to be, good examples of Christians so we too can proclaim the Gospel.

This scripture tells us that Jesus accepted everyone, no matter who, where or what. God loves us and wants us. And we need to do the same.

In the book we are following in Lent, 'Walking the Way of the Cross', we see in today's station 11, that just like the women at the well, the penitent thief found redemption when he met Jesus. He would have been in severe pain, yet he eventually recognised his own sin and saw something in Jesus that leads to his salvation. Right up until his death on the cross Jesus cared and loved humanity so much that his thoughts were to save the dying man beside him.

Stephen Cottrell's reflection sums this up better than me. He is reflecting on the penitent thief, but I can see the Samaritan women in the text, I see myself at some points in my life too, can you see yourself here?

'I saw myself cut adrift, my life falling and falling into the endless abyss of the darkness that swallows those who put themselves outside of God. I wasn't being punished. It would have been so much easier if I was. Then I could have protested my innocence. Or asked for leniency. But I knew I had done wrong and that love, and forgiveness were available if I had the grace to receive them. So I didn't turn to him - not straight away – but to the side of me that mocks him; after all, we are only getting what we deserve, but this man had done nothing wrong.

And still he has not spoken. He is waiting for me. Knowing that I must find this thing within myself. Not just penitence, but love. Not merely acquittal, but hope. Remember me, I say to him, in that kingdom of yours.'

Amen