

Sermon on Sunday 27 September, 8.00am, by Rev. Bill Church Creationtide – Week 4: Water

Readings: John 4. -15, Exodus 17. 1-7

One of the devices used in John's Gospel to emphasise a point is for a hearer to misunderstand Jesus' words so that he or the Evangelist can explain them. And that is what is happening here.

Jesus meant to speak about spiritual water; what the woman heard was about actual water. Some readers might allow themselves a laugh at her expense. But, if so, they would be wrong.

Jesus had asked for drink of real water. The woman was obviously proud of the well from which she could offer that drink. She not so subtly reminded Jesus that, separated though their people were, they shared a common ancestor in Jacob, who had given this well to her town.

And she must have been grateful for the secure source of water that it provided.

But it was not an easy job.

She would have gone out from the town with a pitcher several times a day to collect all her household's water; she had to draw it up from the depths of the well by hand, and then carry it back home. So, no wonder she jumped at what sounded like an offer which would end this drudgery – an offer of actual everyday physical water.

And the episode in Exodus was delivery of actual water in a dry place to meet the pressing thirst of the wandering Israelites. It was used to make a spiritual point about God's power and mercy

transmitted through Moses, but it was physical water, desperately needed.

In each case, the water was a gift – the water from the rock, Jacob's well, a drink given to Jesus, Jesus' promised living water. Water is a gift. Gifts should be received graciously and treated respectfully.

The water supply we are so used to, that we take it for granted, is a gift. It is a gift not always treated respectfully. It is wasted, polluted, undervalued.

Yes, that means us!

We often complain about rain, but average rainfall in Hertford is less than in the Australian cities of Sydney or Melbourne.

That is all the more reason to cherish the remarkable gift we have of clean water on tap, and to do our bit not to waste it or overuse it, so that underground aquifers can be there for the future and enough water can be left for our rivers to run freely; so that we live within our means and do not draw up water faster than it is replenished; so that we do not mine water, like the town of Alice Springs which, despite a sophisticated recycling system, is mining water laid down thousands of years ago and which will be exhausted in 50 years.

The church uses water symbolically in liturgical washing and for foot washing on Maundy Thursday, and to add to the chalice of communion wine and, of course, in baptism.

Our baptism service reminds us that, beyond the liturgy, water cleanses, refreshes and sustains all life.

Water was a gift in Exodus and to Jesus, and to the woman at the well, and is a gift today to us all.

Give thanks to God for that gift.