

260308 Lent 3 All Saints Hove

Collect

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he
suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the
cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and
peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Exodus 17. 1-7

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. The
people quarrelled with Moses, and said, 'Give us
water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you
quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the
people thirsted there for water; and the people
complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you
bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and
livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to
the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are
almost ready to stone me.' The Lord said to Moses,
'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the
elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff
with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be
standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.
Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that
the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of
the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and
Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and
tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or
not?'

Psalm 95

1 O come, let us sing to the Lord; ♦
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.
2 Let us come into his presence with
thanksgiving ♦
and be glad in him with psalms.
3 For the Lord is a great God ♦ and a great king
above all gods.
4 In his hand are the depths of the earth ♦

and the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, ♦ and his hands
have moulded the dry land.

6 Come, let us worship and bow down ♦ and kneel
before the Lord our Maker.

7 For he is our God; ♦

we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of
his hand.

8 O that today you would listen to his voice: ♦

'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, on that day
at Massah in the wilderness,

9 'When your forebears tested me, and put me to
the proof, ♦

though they had seen my works.

10 'Forty years long I detested that generation and
said, ♦

"This people are wayward in their hearts; they do
not know my ways."

11 'So I swore in my wrath, ♦ "They shall not enter
into my rest." '.

Romans 5. 1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have
peace with God through our Lord Jesus
Christ, through whom we have obtained access to
this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our
hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that,
but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that
suffering produces endurance, and endurance
produces character, and character produces
hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because
God's love has been poured into our hearts through
the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ
died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die
for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good
person someone might actually dare to die. But God
proves his love for us in that while we still were
sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then,
now that we have been justified by his blood, will
we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For
if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to
God through the death of his Son, much more
surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by
his life. But more than that, we even boast in God
through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we
have now received reconciliation.

John 4. 5-42

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.'

Sermon

Jewish Rabbis teach that the Israelite were 40 years in the wilderness because God knew they needed more than a generation to forget their slavery in Egypt and be ready for the freedom of the Promised Land.

Lent 3, almost half-way through Lent on the 40 day journey to Easter.

I sing in a choir. Someone who doesn't go to church but knows I am a bishop, asked if I take Lent seriously. It's not just about giving up alcohol or cakes and biscuits, chocolate or whatever, I said. It's a simpler, better focussed time of prayer, study, fasting, charitable giving... to help me and us get back to the things that really matter and make us better human beings in the way of Jesus Christ. And 40 days is long enough to help us change our habits.

How are you doing? And how are we doing in a world riven apart by wars and culture wars and the sense that we're not doing so well?

In the readings from Exodus that we've had in Lent, I love that we're told the Israelites grumbled in Sinai. Where have you taken us? We haven't got water to drink. We're going to die. It was better when we were slaves in Egypt. Poor Moses. They were almost ready to stone him.

And God said,

Go ahead of the people - Leaders always go ahead of the people in the search for new ground. But it often isolates the leaders as most people don't like change.

Take some of the elders with you - Leaders have to gather groups to help, support and strengthen them.

Take the staff with which you struck the Nile. I will be standing in front of you at the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it.

- God is faithful and will continue to do what God has always done. Trust in the journey you have begun.

"The people quarrelled and tested the Lord. Is the Lord among us or not?"

Just under half-way through Sinai and just under half-way through Lent that's how it is! "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Do you take Lent seriously?

This morning's Gospel reading is a fabulous one for All Saints on international Women's Day.

"Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there."

We're in the Promised Land. Today what is thought to be Jacob's well is in Nablus, a Palestinian city on the West Bank. When I visited a long time ago on pilgrimage an Israeli flag declares this is the Promised Land and belongs to Israel because God gave it to the Jews. This is Jacob's well which he gave to his son, Joseph. But in this morning's Gospel, Jacob's well tells us this is going to be another story about water in dry places.

It's a surprising story because it's about Jesus being given water by a person we least expect to give him or us anything: a Samaritan. We're told repeatedly in the Gospels that Jews despised Samaritans. Jesus is among foreigners and they were hated.

Even more unsettling, it's a woman he asks for a drink.

And it turns out she has been married five times and is living with another man.

She ministers to Jesus and it is the occasion for him to declare he is the Messiah and will give living water.

She immediately becomes an evangelist and tells everyone that she has met a man who told her everything she has ever done. And *the Samaritans* asked him to stay, and he stayed for two days. This is not quite an, "On the third day story", we're not yet at the resurrection. He tells the disciples to look around and see the fields are ripe for harvesting.

Really? A woman, Samaritan, married five times and now living with another man. It's not what the disciples or we expect.

This last week I've been in County Durham for a few days. I chair the trustees of The Auckland Project where a wealthy investment manager with a love of Spanish art is following the call of God to do something for a poorer part of the country by investing in the renewal of Bishop Auckland where the Bishop of Durham has lived for centuries in the grandeur of Auckland Palace in what has been a depressed town on the edge of what was the Durham coalfield.

In 2011 the Church Commissioners wanted to offload Auckland Palace and find somewhere more appropriate *and cheaper* for the Bishop to live. The Palace has a remarkable collection of paintings by Zurbaran of Jacob and his twelve sons. Jonathan Ruffer was persuaded to buy them, and placed the Palace and the paintings in trust for the people of the region. They are at the heart of his major 30 years renew and restore Bishop Auckland so we think the project is half-way through. Of course there's been quarrelling and grumbling along the way but it's beginning to look good.

The history of the paintings of Jacob and his 12 sons is remarkable.

In 1753 Parliament had passed the Jewish Naturalisation Act which allowed Jews born abroad to become British citizens without becoming Christians. The Bishop of Durham supported this but the Act was met with such hostility and violent anti-semitism that a year later "The Jew Bill" was repealed.

In 1756 Zurbaran's more than life-size paintings of Jacob and his sons came up at auction and Bishop Richard Trevor bought them and hung them in his dining room. They made an enormous statement to his guests about Jews belonging in the Bishop's Palace.

And they make a marvellous determined statement from 1756 to us today about what it means to be British: inclusive, accepting, tolerant of religious diversity. Their significance nowadays is for the Abrahamic faiths – Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Ruffer made a commitment to open a Faith Museum. It tells the history of Christianity in Britain, particularly in the NE, from Roman times, including some of the less savoury aspects of contested histories.

One of my predecessors as Bishop of Salisbury, Shute Barrington, became Bishop of Durham. In 1788 his chaplain, Thomas Burgess, who became Bishop of St David's and then Bishop of Salisbury, published a book 'On the Gradual Emancipation of Slavery' He and Bishop Barrington helped mobilize support for

abolition through Anglican networks, framing the movement as a necessary step for Britain to regain "divine favour."

The Faith Museum has just acquired a portrait of William Wilberforce which will help tell what was a controversial but is now a settled story. It's the implications for us that are still contested. What do we do with this now?

David Olusoga, the British Nigerian historian, in conversation at the Brighton Festival a few years ago said: "My job is not to make you feel guilty. My job is to tell stories that either we did not know or have forgotten. It is for the artists to tell us their meaning."

The Museum includes artefacts from other faiths now settled in the NE bringing up to date the story of Bishop Trevor, Zurbaran, Jacob and his Twelve Sons. They offer a different story to the dominant narratives of hostility and enmity between people of different faiths.

Half-way through Lent, in a world at war, we're murmuring,
and Moses strikes the rock to give us water,
the Samaritan woman gives Jesus a drink at Jacob's well,
Jesus promises living water,
and, thank God,

in the discipline and restraint, the generosity and renewal, of a good Lent we are open to surprising gifts from God through unexpected people, and we get a glimpse of what it might be like to live in the Promised Land.