

**DSW Methodist Circuit Written Service for
Sunday 12 March 2023**

Welcome to this time of worship wherever you are.

Hymn [STF 51]

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960)

Prayers

Loving Living Lord, we come to worship because
you are the source of the living water of eternal
life.
You refresh us with your Word, you surround us
with your Love, you fill us to overflowing with your
Spirit.
We offer you our praise and our adoration for you
are worthy of all honour and glory.
We come as we are, with our minds, bodies and
souls in need of your refreshment, your forgiveness
and your renewing restoring love.
Please forgive us, Lord,
for the times when we've fallen short of your ways
of love;
when we've failed to put you first in our lives,
when we've hurt you and others and ourselves by
our unkind actions and words.
Help us to acknowledge our wrongdoing and fill us
with your grace and your love so that we can
become more like you in all that we do and say and
think.
Thank you for your gracious words to us: your sins
are forgiven. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading: John 4:5-30, 39-42

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near
the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son
Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he
was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was
about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus
said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples
had gone into the town to buy food.)
The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and
I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a
drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)
Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and
who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have
asked him and he would have given you living water."
"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with
and the well is deep. Where can you get this living
water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave
us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his
sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be
thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them
will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will
become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal
life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that
I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to
draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."
"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have
no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands,
and the man you now have is not your husband. What
you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a
prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but
you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is
in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is
coming when you will worship the Father neither on this
mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship
what you do not know; we worship what we do know,
for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and
has now come when the true worshipers will worship
the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the
kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and
his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."
The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called
Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain
everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am
he."

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

Sermon

This detailed account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is fascinating because it begins with a simple request for a drink of water and then develops into a much deeper theological dialogue.

Jesus is tired and thirsty when he comes across this woman who can help him get a drink from the well. But she's alone at noon (most women went to the well in the morning or evening) and she's a Samaritan, so he's risking his reputation as a devout Jew by even talking to her.

She also knows he shouldn't be sharing conversation or a cup of water with her, but she is surprised when Jesus offers her "living water" which can quench thirst forever. That must have sounded good to someone who carried a heavy water jar back home each day, but perhaps not surprisingly at first she finds it difficult to get past the apparent contradiction of a man talking to her about the water he can give her, when he hasn't even got a bucket to be able to get at the well!

But as the conversation develops the woman begins to understand that Jesus is not talking about a physical need for water, but a deeper need for spiritual and holistic wellbeing. So she asks Jesus to give her this living water, and then when she realises that Jesus is a prophet,

because "he knows all that I have ever done," instead of trying to defend or explain herself, she engages Jesus in a kind of interfaith dialogue, asking him the about the hot religious question that divided Jews & Samaritans at that time: Where is the proper place to worship God? (I wonder what our hot issue question would be to Jesus today?)

And when the woman begins to understand that Jesus might be the long-awaited Messiah, she throws caution to the winds and leaves her jar & rushes back to town to tell people about her encounter with him.

There must have been something in what she said and how she spoke which made the townspeople listen and then decide to come to see Jesus and we're told that many became believers.

It's interesting to note that this is the longest recorded conversation Jesus has with anyone, including religious leaders, and it's with a woman, and yet we don't even know her name!

This conversation took place outside safe territory for a Jewish man to be, and Jesus was flouting the rules of his religion and stepping outside the conventionally accepted standards of behaviour to talk to this woman.

And the well where this encounter happened was a place which was part of the everyday life of this woman & her community, it was a place of refreshment and sustenance and a place with the possibility of meeting others.

So where might be the equivalent of the well in our neighbourhood today? Where are the places of everyday conversation and refreshment, where relationships are formed and deepened? A coffee bar perhaps, or the local library, or a parent & toddler group, maybe?

Jesus went onto the woman's patch, a place which was familiar to her and where she felt at home, but in doing so he also ran the risk that she might end the conversation.

So what might the equivalent be for us? Where and how might we be willing to meet people on their terms, in their home territory, where they are, perhaps?

Rather than demanding that they come to our home territory and do things our way, in church?

Jesus allowed himself to be vulnerable to refusal by this woman. He began this encounter by identifying something the woman could do for him, rather than what he could do for her, and by doing so, he affirmed her value as a person.

So how can we offer care to others in a way that isn't patronising or undermining, but that affirms them & accepts that they might also have something to offer us, as well as vice versa?

Jesus crossed the boundaries of gender, religion and etiquette to show that God's love isn't restricted by such boundaries.

In what ways might we be limiting our love & care to those who are "acceptable", or conform to our expectations of "proper" behaviour?

How can we learn to take risks & leave behind our own preconceptions and to give people space to be themselves and learn about God's love and acceptance of them?

Jesus' conversation began as a conversation about physical needs, but it developed, because Jesus accepted this woman without judging her; he listened to her & he even discussed theology with her. He moved the conversation towards a discussion about deeper spiritual health in a way that was non-threatening and didn't undermine her worth as an individual.

How can we, when we meet with others who are different from us, express our acceptance of them as a person, in a way that takes into account their story and their situation?

Can we engage in a dialogue which is non-threatening but acknowledges the needs of the whole person, including their spiritual well-being, and leads us both into a conversation about the really important spiritual things in life?

This situation of need for Jesus turned into an opportunity to lead many people who were considered undesirable to the Jews to discover their need of the grace and forgiveness God offers. Are we willing to allow God's Holy Spirit to guide us to be channels of His transforming and empowering love for others?

And are we willing to step outside our comfort zones, and the expectations of others, in order to encounter the presence of Jesus in the people & places we least expect, and help those we meet to do the same?

Amen.

Prayers

Loving living God, we praise and thank you that you are our living water, the source of our wellbeing and refreshment.

Thank you that we can come to you as we are, with confidence, because we know that you understand what it is like to thirst for cool water in the wilderness places, and for justice and righteousness, and we know you love & accept us. Please fill us with the life-giving water that you offer, not just so that our thirst may be quenched, but also so that we can become a wellspring for others in their need.

We ask in and through Jesus' name. Amen.

Intercessions:

Living God,

we have turned parts of your world into a desert, making the lives of many difficult, damaged and dry. We have exploited the earth, polluted its waters, grabbed selfishly at its resources and held them tight.

We have not cultivated justice, compassion, understanding, or sought the rights of others, but only of ourselves.

So we lift to you those of this world who thirst.

We pray for all those who cry out for water to drink today.

For those in places of violence, we pray for the outpouring of peace.

For those in places of poverty, we pray for the outpouring of abundance.

For those in places of wealth, we pray for the outpouring of generosity.

For those in places of despair, we pray for the outpouring of hope.

For those in places of sickness we pray for the outpouring of healing.

In all places, Lord, we pray for the outpouring of life, in all its fullness.

In the name of him, who poured out his life for us upon the cross, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

And may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, this day and always
Amen.

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Hymn [STF 465]

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

*William Williams (1717-1791)
Translated by Peter Williams (1727-1797)*

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

May we go out into our lives in the world
Giving thanks that we are accepted.
Giving thanks that we belong
Giving thanks that you give us the water of life to
drink
and that you invite us to be accepting of others,
and invite them to drink your living water too.