



Lenten Cross 2026

The third symbol to add to our Lenten Cross is a child's story book. Jesus told stories to illustrate the nature of God. His Kingdom stories - often called parables – were simple tales that folk could easily identify with. Their meaning, though, was far from simple and could be understood at a number of levels. Jesus' teaching ministry was deep and he made enemies of those who were implicitly criticised in the tales.

StF 248: I heard the voice of Jesus say

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise
and all your day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N Bonar (1808-1889)



*Let the little children come to me,
do not stop them; for it is to such
as these that the Kingdom
belongs. Mark 10:14*

Prayer

Christ who calls us to be as little children, help us to lay down the mental strictures and negativity we have developed with maturity and experience. May we dismiss our cynicism and grasp the new life on offer seeing the world through the trusting eyes of the innocent infants you call us to be. Amen.

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." "But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." "Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water." "Go and get your husband," Jesus told her. "I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband - for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!" "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. ²³But the time is coming - indeed it's here now - when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming - the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!" Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about." "Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other. Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world."

STF 365: Jesu, the joy of loving hearts

1 Jesus, the joy of loving hearts,
the fount of life and light of all;
from the best bliss that earth imparts,
we turn unfilled to heed your call.

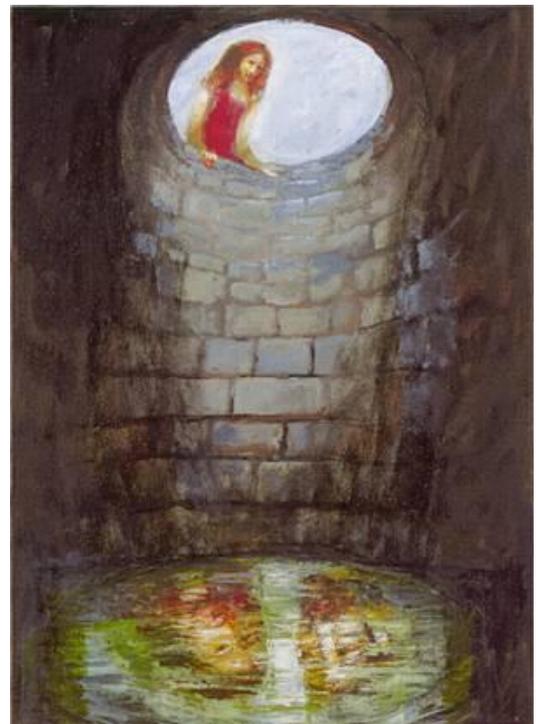
2 Your truth unchanged has ever stood;
you save all those who on you call;
to those that seek you, you are good,
to those that find you, all in all.

3 We taste of you, the living Bread,
and long to feast upon you still;
we drink of you, the fountain-head,
our thirsty our souls from you we fill.

4 Our restless spirits long to be,
with you, where'er our lot is cast;
glad when your gracious smile we see,
blest when our faith can hold you fast.

5 O Jesus, ever with us stay,
make all our moments calm and bright;
chase the dark night of sin away;
shed o'er the world Thy holy light.

Ray Palmer (1808-1887)



When confronted with a Gospel passage that is very familiar, I sometimes imagine myself in the place of one of the characters in the story and retell it from their point of view. The “sermon as story” was a technique I was introduced to by the former Leeds District Chair, the late Rev Michael Townsend. So today, I offer you my story sermon as told by the Woman at the Well:

Story Sermon

It was a scorching hot day and you might think me mad going to fetch water at midday. But that was the only way to avoid the condemning looks. It’s not that I’m ashamed of who I am, or what I’ve done, but I was fed up with all the whispering behind the hands of the other women. I couldn’t be doing with their tittle tattle – not to mention their holier than thou attitude. I’m sure there were skeletons in their cupboards too, but they weren’t afraid to show that they felt superior to me. So, it was easier really, emotionally, if not physically, to go and draw water when there was no-one else around. However, when I went for water that day, as I approached Jacob’s Well, I could see through the heat haze the shadowy figure of someone else there. At first my heart sank, but as I drew nearer, I could see it wasn’t one of the women it was a man. He looked vaguely familiar – and very weary. It was Jesus the Jew. I’d seen him around before – usually surrounded by a group of about a dozen friends or a whole crowd of people. It was unusual to see him on his own – perhaps he had sent his friends off to the city to buy lunch, while he enjoyed a few precious moments to himself. I decided it would be safe for me to continue with my task of collecting water. He was unlikely to bother me. Being a Samaritan and a woman of a somewhat dubious reputation, he would probably just ignore me. How wrong I was! As I lowered my bucket to draw water, so Jesus initiated a conversation with me. “Give me a drink”, he said. Well, I was a bit taken a back. And I’m afraid my reply may have sounded a little off-hand. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” I retorted. But it’s no secret that Jews and Samaritans have little in common. Still, he persisted in his conversation, though he seemed to start talking in riddles. “If you knew the gift of God,” he said, “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.” I looked at him and thought, “What are you on about, you don’t even have a bucket, how can you give me water.” And then I told him what I was thinking. I asked him where he was going to get this living water from and if he thought himself to be greater than our ancestor Jacob. Jesus obviously wasn’t offended by what I said, as he continued.

He told me that those who received water from him would never be thirsty again and that the water he gave would become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. Then the penny dropped. He was talking about something within me. Something that would satisfy me. Something that would fill the huge void I felt in my inner life. Something that might break the spiral of unsuccessful relationships that I seemed to have got locked into. Maybe this water, would clear the blocked pipes in my life and allow the Spirit to flow. You know what it's like. How you just can't seem to move on, when there is something gnawing away inside you. No matter how you try, it just seems to dominate and cloud everything else that's going on. At last, someone was offering me something that could finally produce the answer to all my problems. Boldly, I asked Jesus to give me some of this water. But he didn't. He told me to go away and come back with my husband. I began to feel a little uneasy and shifted my weight from foot to foot, because I didn't have a husband. Yes, I was in a relationship, but we weren't married. I'd been through all that before, five times in fact. And because each marriage had ended in disaster, I'd vowed never to go through that again. "I don't have a husband", I said, rather sheepishly. "You're right", he said, "You don't have a husband. You've had five husbands and the man you're with now is not your husband." Well, he could only have known that if he was a prophet. But as I acknowledged his prophetic power, I tried to change the subject. I wanted to divert him from the painful subject of all my failed relationships. I raised an area of disagreement between Jews and Samaritans. That of where we should worship. Should we worship on the mountain right where we were stood, or in the Temple in Jerusalem. Can you blame me? I mean, which of you haven't tried to turn a conversation when it turns to the heart of the matter, because you're not sure how you're going to react? Maybe, if you're the listener to the conversation you feel a temptation to jump in and say something "helpful," or as speaker, maybe you try to steer the conversation away to something safe – the weather perhaps? Maybe we all need to learn to set aside our tiredness, our own concerns or fears, so that we can really listen, or have the courage to speak with vulnerability. However, it didn't work. Me trying to change the subject, that is. Because Jesus still went straight to the heart of the matter. He wasn't going to be drawn into an argument about where God should be worshipped. Instead, he pointed out that a time was coming, and had arrived, even, when God would be worshipped everywhere – in Spirit and in truth. Then he told me that he was the Messiah that everyone was waiting for. It was at that point his disciples returned and started having a go at Jesus for talking to me. I seized the opportunity to make my exit and to the city. But I couldn't keep quiet. I had to tell everyone about my encounter with Jesus. And I told them that they should go and see him too. Well, they did. And they were so taken with what he had to say that they asked him to stay. And he did. He came back to the city and stayed for two whole days. If anyone had doubted what I said, once they'd met Jesus for themselves, they were convinced. They believed all that he had to say and concluded he was indeed the Saviour of the world as he had claimed. And all because Jesus had bothered with me of all people – an outcast. He'd stuck his neck out to talk me, disregarding my gender, my racial background, my lifestyle. He'd pushed beyond the barriers of what was socially acceptable and treated me as a person. He allowed me to tell my story and acknowledging that I could do something for him. And I know that he wants me – and you – to do the same. He challenges us to move beyond the barriers and acknowledge those in our world who are ignored or treated badly because of who they are or what they've done. You know who those people are – the woman who sells the Big Issue in the town centre, the ex-convict who comes to your door selling cleaning materials, the person who is always sat on their own at the church coffee morning, the disadvantaged children you see on TV helped by the Children in Need appeal. He gave up his life for those people, just as much as he did for you. As I say – you know yourselves who Jesus wants you to reach out to. Will you accept his challenge?

Prayers of Intercession

Living God, we have turned parts of your world into a desert, making the lives of many difficult and dry. We have exploited the earth, polluted its waters, grabbed selfishly at its resources and held them tight. Living God, show us your better way, that the desert may blossom and the peoples of the earth know dignity and plenty. Help us to care for and respect your creation; to share its resources that human needs may be met.

God of grace, we thirst for you: give us the water of life.

Living God, we have turned parts of your world into a desert, making the lives of many difficult and dry. We have not cultivated justice, compassion, understanding or sought the rights of others, only of ourselves. Living God, show us your better way, that the desert may blossom and the peoples of the earth find self-respect and peace. Help us to pursue a vision of your godly and just kingdom, offering our lives to others, obedient to the law of love. God of grace, we thirst for you: give us the water of life.

Living God, sometimes our journey with you takes us through the desert, our lives become difficult and dry; our bodies become sick, our hearts ache with sorrow; we stumble over doubts, anxieties and fears. Living God, lead us along your better way, to the desert that blossoms, watered by springs of joy and peace, your living water. Help us to endure our trials trustfully and with hope that the truth of your love may flow through our lives. God of grace, we thirst for you: give us the water of life.

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

STF 672: Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our master?

Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?

We want to serve you, to answer your call.

Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?

What should we do in our service to all?

‘Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
out of my plenty, think what you can share.

‘Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

‘Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
go where my sheep are rejected and lost
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
go and do likewise, and don’t count the cost.’

Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?

We are your servants who answer your call.

You go before us, and there we will follow,
taking our cross in the service of all.

Alan Charles Dickinson (b. 1954)

Concluding prayer

Lord, thank you that you choose to reveal yourself to us and that you know us, love us, and sustain us. Help us to return to you, again and again, to be refreshed and renewed by your living water. **Amen.**