



*Go Home!
Your son lives!*



21 March, 2021

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Centre you thoughts on Christ who calls us to follow Him as you listen to this.

LISTEN The Lord's My Shepherd I'll not want

READ "Catch your breath" from TearFund's lenten reflection series

'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.' (Hebrews 10:23)

God's faithfulness is unswerving. Read and declare these Truths over your life:

When we are anxious and long for peace, we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess – knowing that He who promised, is faithful.

When we are weary and strength has left us, we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess – knowing that He who promised, is faithful.

When our way ahead is unclear and we don't know what to do, we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess – knowing that He who promised is faithful.

When we are grieving and our tears run freely, we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess – knowing that He who promised is faithful.

When we are joyful and thankful for God's presence, we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess – knowing that He who promised is faithful.

Fiona Michael (Fiona leads Tearfund Cymru (Wales)).

PRAYER

O God! You make all things new, new stars, new dust, new life; take my heart, every hardened edge and measured beat and make it new. Not just my heart Lord, make smooth all rough parts; stir all that is the stagnant; free everything that is stuck, and all that is unkind and vile, forgive. By the power of the Holy Spirit, turn me to face your love and be made new! **AMEN**

HYMN

All Hail the Power of Jesus Name

PRAYER for our WORLD

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your loving kindness. In your great compassion, hear these our prayers and petitions.

We pray for our nation, for all who govern, administer and judge. Purge us from our sin of pride and hubris, that we know everything and can do everything without the help of others. Grant our leaders Your wisdom to be fair and upright in all they do.

We pray for those who hunger, those who thirst, those who cry out for justice, those who live under the threat of terror, and those without a place to lay their head. In their midst, may they hear voices of gladness and joy.

We pray for those who are ill, those in pain, those under stress, and those who are lonely. Give them the joy of your saving help, and sustain them with your bountiful Spirit.

We remember those we know who have died, the lives they lived, and their blessing to us. May those who miss the presence of their loved one and grieve their absence, know Your comfort and Your abiding peace.

Lord Jesus, as we prepare our hearts to remember Your death and resurrection, grant us Faith to know this as Truth, and proclaim it as such.

We pray for Your church, here, across this land and all over the world. May all leaders, Ministers and Pastors know the sanctity of their calling and be faithful to it.

And we ask Loving Father, for a thankful Spirit, that we be ever grateful to you, not only for what you for us on a daily basis, but that You love us so much, You want us back with you for eternity! **AMEN**

HYMN

Jesus shall reign where're the sun

MESSAGE

This past week I have had interesting conversations about the Samaritan woman's dialogue with Jesus at Jacob's well¹, reflecting on how it comes so naturally and easily to us, to cast someone in a bad light. Our pre-conceived notions, cultural blindspots, role in society, education, upbringing and life experience, are filters through which we paint pictures of people, creating a "them-and-us" mentality, which is the root of racism in society.

In this narrative, this popular way of interpretation pre-supposes the "enmity" between Jews and Samaritans and builds on the Jewish belief they were "chosen" and the Samaritans were not. So a lone woman at a well at noon, must be particularly immoral, which casts the entire conversation that followed, in the light of this negative viewpoint. It is even more sad that we hear in the text, the woman supposedly *taunting* Jesus with her questions and comments, and Jesus *in retaliation*, exposing her sin: a pattern of broken family relationships due most-likely, to her promiscuous character.

The phrase, "*He told me everything I ever did*", we understand to mean, "*He told me every sinful and sordid act I have ever done*".

We started in v4 noting that this encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan lady at Jacob's well in Samaria was divinely appointed by the Father, to help a hapless and unhappy lady find joy in the midst of personal angst and suffering, to become a blessing to an entire town. Now we appreciate her comment, "*He told me everything I ever did*", as a simple statement that the woman's entire life was known to Jesus (not necessarily a life of sexual immorality). In other words, this verse should be understood as, "*He knows everything about me. He knows the pain I endure, the loss of husbands through death and divorce, the stigma of childlessness and now living under the care of a man who is not my husband, ... this Man knows and appreciates my condition in life! No one has ever come close to knowing the real me!*"

¹ Dr Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg's fascinating book, "The Samaritan Woman Reconsidered" forms the background of our reading this popular narrative (available in print and Kindle format)

If you were a townsfolk in her village, whom would you respond to: a person of dubious moral character inviting you to meet someone who told her the sordid details of her life (not much imagination required here!), or would you respond enthusiastically to a person whose life you know has not been “normal” as most others, who has met Someone so special, who knows all about her **REAL** self, **and** has found **REAL** joy in life? I should think the latter is more plausible!

Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus (ch.3) ended with him going away with the words of Jesus echoing in his mind, *“Those who do what is right, come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants”* (3:21) which he would have played and replayed in his mind many, many times, until he defends Jesus in public (7:50) and finally joins his colleague Joseph of Arimathea with enough spices to do an initial embalming before sunset and the beginning of the Sabbath - *others saw him in the light, doing what God wanted done.*

Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan lady at a well in Samaria ends with her inviting her entire village to a revival meeting, after which they said to her, *“Now we believe, not just because of what you told us dear woman, but because we have heard Him ourselves. Now we know that He is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

We must learn to read Scripture as continuous history, irrespective of the Author. What follows (our text for today) is another encounter with Jesus. Note how John presents this to us: when *a government official (46) ... heard Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee ...he **BEGGED** Jesus to come and heal his dying son ... **pleading**, Lord come now before my little boy dies!* Have you ever heard or seen a government official **BEG** or **PLEAD** with anyone, even a Holy man? The mind boggles, yet his response is understandable. He would have been used to people coming to him, begging and pleading for justice, for fairness, for equity, for an impartial verdict and objective judgement. Many of such cases would have been as important to the litigant, as was the life of this official’s young son. If the official dismissed each case with the statement, *Go and it will done as you have requested - I believe your pleading is earnest*, the official would have seen the

authority with which this man Jesus said to him, *“Go back home. Your son lives!”*

As did many litigants in his court, this man **believed** what Jesus said and started his return journey home, except this time, his household staff were running in search of him to say that his son was alive and well.

I can just imagine the chorus ringing out across Heaven on Easter day, *Your Son, Eternal God, is alive and well, just as You said would happen!*, so too would have been the joy of those who broke the news to this official.

I love the way John narrates this incident, starting with *a Government Official, ... the official pleaded ... the man believed, ... Then the father realised ...*

Our standing in society does not matter; some believe it does and therefore they must sit upfront and be seen speaking loudly, shaking hands, photographed in the company of the right people. We do not encounter Christ in our social capacity; ultimately it is a man, a woman, a child who encounters the living Christ, and their lives never remain the same. *What time was my son healed? ... at one o'clock, ... the same time Jesus told him, ‘Your son lives’.*

A woman by a well in Samaria, leaves her water jar and runs back to the village, *Come meet the man who knows me inside-out. Could He possibly be Messiah?* A man of high social standing, gathers his family for a prayer of thanksgiving and leads them into faith, believing that Jesus was in their midst, who healed their infant son!

In a fortnight we shall celebrate Easter. How shall we do it? Will we set off fireworks as we do when our football team wins a match? Why not?! Getting over our preconceived notions is not easy, and overcoming our interpretive preconditioning is even more difficult. The Swedish theologian Krister O. Stendahl noted, *“Our vision is often more abstracted by what we think we know, than by our lack of knowledge.”* How will we respond this Easter to the news of Jesus’ resurrection? Will we cast aside the embarrassment of *being Christian* and invite people, *Come and meet the One who knows me inside-out! He **IS** the Messiah!*, or

will we gather our family, count our blessings, name them one-by-one, and renew our faith in Eternal God, who is getting ready for His Son, Jesus to establish His kingdom on earth and connect us back into eternity? **AMEN.**

HYMN Be Thou My Vision

BENEDICTION

God of every place and Master of all time. We have just been through a year, closeted in our homes, protecting ourselves and others against an unknown virus.

As we open the windows to let the fresh air of your Holy Spirit refresh us with Your Word, and open the door to our lives for the Christ to renew His home in us, shield us from preconceived ideas about You, Father and prejudices about people around us Lord, and prepare us to be light and salt in Your world, for Your glory. All this we ask in the Name of Jesus, Your Son and our Saviour. **AMEN.**

HYMN Count Your many Blessings, Name them One-by-One

**As you make coffee/tea/juice
and indulge in a slice of cake,
let your hearts and minds be filled
with joy,
the kind only God gives,
and
with peace,
the kind only Christ gives!**