

Exodus 17: 1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5: 1-11
St. John 4: 5-42

Lent III 2023.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

John 4: 7

Two examples of human trafficking were in the Canadian news in the past couple of weeks. In one story, some immigrants from Mexico were invited to come to Canada for a better life, but were forced to work long hours in degrading positions, for low pay and miserable housing in the Toronto area. As of a few days ago, 5 were arrested for human trafficking, with arrest warrants out for 2 more criminals...

A second recent example is concern being raised in northern communities, about the relatively high number of Innu women who come south, and then become victims of sexual forced labour form of human trafficking. As is typical in these cases, the figure who exploits the women – more often, but not always, a male – initially presents as a charming person who showers them with gifts, before demanding sexual services for money as a repayment... Community leaders in the north are working with police agencies in the south, to try to reduce the incidence of these crimes...

Core to human trafficking, in whatever form it takes, is robbing fellow human beings of their human dignity, usually for financial profit for the perpetrators of these crimes. Whatever differences we might have with other races, other nations, or other religions, as Christians, we are to treat all people with dignity and respect...

In contrast to human exploitation, the gospel reading for today is a beautiful example of how the Lord Jesus treated people who were put down in his society with dignity and respect, while inviting them to come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ himself, the long-awaited Messiah...

The context of John 4 is that the Lord Jesus and his first disciples are travelling in Gentile territory, northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples have gone to a nearby town to buy food. The sun is beating hot in that parched land. Jesus is waiting at the community well, when a woman comes to get water. The Lord Jesus asks her for a drink...

Now, this exchange might mean nothing to us in our culture, but for the first-century readers, this is cultural dynamite: A man is asking a woman – a woman he doesn't know, not a family member – he is asking her for a drink of water! He's engaging with her in public! Furthermore, the woman isn't a regular Jewish woman! She's one of those hated Samaritans! She's one of *them*!... Jesus and this woman go on to have a conversation. Using what is right in front of them, the Lord Jesus uses the presence of water to

introduce her to himself... No doubt the woman was at first astonished and perhaps terrified, but gradually, lets her guard down...

It emerges that this woman has a troubled past. In a culture when women had very little social status apart from being in the family, and in when men – note, men, not women – could divorce their wives at the drop of a hat, simply by declaring the divorce in front of male witnesses... This woman had been married 4 times, and was now living with another guy. She was likely thought of as cheap used goods... We can imagine the gossip in the village: She can't keep a man. What's wrong with her, that so many men have used her? She's probably promiscuous – there's lots of names we could use for a woman like that... Rather than getting water from the well at the beginning or the end of the day as was customary, this unnamed woman was getting water at noon time, perhaps to avoid the sneers and gossip and stares of her fellow villagers...

In contrast, the Lord Jesus treats this woman with dignity and respect, while introducing himself to her as the Messiah. The conversation becomes uncomfortable at one point, as the woman sees that he understands the depth of her condition more than anyone she has ever known. But Jesus brings her gradually back to that all-important conversation: What about the Messiah, the Christ?...

Spiritually full of the Living Water, the woman rushes into the town, to get people to come to meet this extraordinary young Rabbi. The woman didn't have to be told that she had some weighty duty to introduce others to Jesus Christ – no one could shut her up!... Confused but intrigued, the fellow villagers come to the well, and their lives are changed forever too...

Meanwhile, the disciples come back with food. They are flabbergasted that their Master was talking with a *Samaritan woman*, but they are learning a model of how to treat others, and how to invite others into a relationship with Jesus Christ himself...

Last week, we considered inter-faith relations – that is, what is our stance to be toward others who are not Christians, and who have no interest in becoming Christians? This is one of the “Lambeth Calls,” which we're being invited to engage with, following last summer's Lambeth Conference...

Today, let's consider two other “Lambeth Calls” – first, about human dignity; second, evangelism...

In Canada, most of us take human dignity for granted. But let's watch out for these little digs, these little offenses, which can diminish the dignity of another human being.

Here's a practical example:

When I prepare couples for marriage, we look at the marriage vows. These marriage vows conclude with one spouse committing to the other “to love and to cherish...” I think we do a pretty good job of loving our spouses, in a healthy relationship. But for those of us who are married, do we always *cherish* our spouses?... This doesn't mean pretending that the other person is perfect, but it does mean we encourage them, think well of them, and that we don't put them down...

Some of us may remember the TV show *Home Improvements*, which was cancelled a few years ago. A lot of the show was about the relationship between Tim the Tool Man Taylor, and his wife Jill. I'm sure they loved each other. But did they – cherish each other?... He was often making little snippy comments about her bad cooking. She would often roll her eyes because he was like a snoring ape when he slept, and spent the household money on ridiculous horsepower projects... Were they building one another up, or tearing one another down?... “Cherishing” is about building up our family members and our friends...

Little snippy comments can seem harmless in one way. But I suggest, they actually work against treating our brothers and sisters with dignity and respect. It requires a change of attitude, and a change in our behaviour. We are learning to live, modelled after the moral character of the Lord Jesus...

There's another aspect of it too. When people wish, or are seeking, we can invite them into this amazing relationship with a Friend who will never leave us, a Saviour through whom we have nothing ever again to fear... In a gracious, gentle way, we learn to cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus to invite... to offer... The rest we leave with God, and with the other person. But any of us can invite...

Last week, we broke into groups of 2 or 3 to talk about other religions. Today, I'm going to ask you to slide down the pews, and get together again. (Remember, Archbishop Anne is going to be asking us about this, when she comes to St. Brice's on 16 April.) Please take a few minutes to discuss the first question, and to pray quietly for the other 2:

1. Human Dignity: Can you think of a time when you felt humiliated or ashamed? What are some encouraging words you can say to others?
2. Evangelism: For people you know who don't seem to be churchgoers, or who say they aren't Christians, would you consider privately praying at least twice a week, at least until Easter?
3. Evangelism: Becoming a Christian is often a process, of learning to respond to Christ's love. Remember manners: Sorry. Thank you. Please.
Sorry: I've sorry for what I've done wrong.
Thank you: Thank you that you love me, all the way to the cross.
Please: Please fill my life.

Can you say that silently for yourself? If someone asks, do you think you could help them say that prayer? (If not, what are the barriers?)

prayer: Human Dignity
 Help us help others know your love.