

Harvest Sermon preached on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 by The Rev'd Jackie Bullen

Gospel reading - John 4. 1-14

What have you used water for today?

It's something that we use every day but possibly don't even think about. You may not realise how much you use each day, we don't often think about it as we turn the tap on. We have a wash or shower, make a drink, clean our teeth, eat breakfast, wash the dishes and flush the toilet all before 9am.

Every day we turn on the taps and expect water to come out of them, and we think little of it.

75 % of the earth is covered with water. 97 % of earth's water is in the oceans. Only 3 % of the earth's water can be used as drinking water.

Although a person can live without food for more than a month, a person can only live without water for approximately one week.

More than 3.4 million people die each year from water, sanitation, and hygiene-related causes. 650 million people live without safe water.

1 in 3 people don't have access to a safe and private toilet and this means many girls drop out of education and stops women from working. These facts and figures make us stop and think.

As people who eat food that has been grown in the fields and harvested, we are also aware of our reliance on water for everything that sustains us. Our farmers are aware more than most of us of the need for water and not just the quantity but also the frequency. Water can be such a blessing when it comes as long as it doesn't come all at once.

We get anxious about our weather and rain is one of the most spoken about things when you listen to a weather forecast. If it is going to rain we want to know how much and when and if it isn't we want to know when it is next forecast.

Maybe the reason for the anxiety is that water is so important to us. This sermon isn't intended to be a lesson about the weather, but it is an opportunity. An opportunity to remember how important water is for us. An opportunity to thank God for the water he has given to us and for the harvest we celebrate because we have that water.

An opportunity to think – what can we do so that people around the world can have access to clean water in the way we do and to be able to grow and harvest food for themselves and to think about Jesus who told the people that if they came to him they would never be thirsty again.

Our reading today about the woman at the well speaks clearly of the need for water.

For Christians, water is symbolic of our relationship with God, used in baptism, it carries an image of renewal, promise and hope. It is through water at our baptism that we are welcomed into the Christian community.

Water is essential to life and is a gift from God, and as a gift from God, it is meant to be shared.

In the Gospel reading we heard this.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus breaks down any human barriers between people of different races and declares us all equal and equally valued in his sight.

When people say 'charity begins at home', the Christian response can only be

'Yes it does' because as Christians, we are taught by Jesus that the whole world is our home. He came to break down our man made barriers and borders and Jesus himself asked a woman from a different culture for water. The woman went to that place for one thing only; to draw some refreshing water from the deep, cool well and that's why Jesus was there too. He had been walking all day in the heat, and simply needed a drink and they have a conversation, which gets to a point where Jesus says

"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."

Living water. It sounds appealing.

Jesus elaborates. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

With majestic simplicity, Jesus short circuits the discussion. He simply announces the truth of who he is and what he can offer to all people.

Every day we wake up and we are thirsty, physically thirsty and emotionally and spiritually thirsty for more love, more care, more acceptance more meaning in our lives. We look for many ways to satisfy this thirst.

People reach out for all sorts of things that they think might provide them with meaning; a healthy bank balance, house, possessions, career, relationship with another human being but deep down we also know that our thirst cannot be quenched by any physical or human source.

Our ultimate need is for something to believe in that will give complete satisfaction. Jesus says to us, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." He promised that he was that life giving water. Jesus turns our despair into hope, our doubt into faith and offers us life, eternal life. He offers a quality of life beyond anything we have dreamed off, an inner fulfilment and peace, and a new sense of purpose in life.

And it is a promise that holds true for today – in a world thirsty for meaning, Jesus tells us to come to him and we shall never be thirsty again. He satisfies our longing and our need.

As we celebrate and thank God for the harvest I would like to leave you with this thought.

When you fill a glass with water from the tap and drink it or when you fill the kettle to make a drink, spend a moment thanking God that you can do so.

Thank him that you live in a country where you can use fresh water with the assurance that it is safe to do so and ask him to show you how you can bring about changes in the world so that others can do the same.

And as it satisfies your physical need for water, thank God that Jesus is the water of life who satisfies our deepest needs.

Amen