

2026-03-08 ... 10am Worship Together Sermon .... Mrs Jane Rylands

Exodus 17: 1-7; Romans 5: 1-11; John 4: 5-42

Such a rich stream of things to think about in this morning's three readings; I'm just going to talk about two things really.

First let's look at **living water**. It's different to what Moses provides in the Exodus story – that's 'just' miracle water, amazing in its own right of course!

Living water is probably not even water – for the woman at the well, the living water was that Jesus knew everything she ever did.

Living water is that moment when we notice God's tap on our shoulder and we have the time / energy / need to explore what that might mean. That connection with God buries itself inside us and we can spend the rest of our lives exploring it. Even if we don't follow up on the moment straight away, or if we start on but abandon that journey, the connection remains as something which niggles away inside us, never to go completely away and always ready to be pondered.

I'm interested to explore a little more the woman at the well. I wonder what you think about her, how you feel you might relate to her?

Are you filled with disdain for her? Are you full of sympathy for her? Do you identify with her? Because she's an outsider? Because she's been misused by the men in her life?

We can come to a conclusion about someone very quickly can't we – here in just a few lines of text; in life, on little more than a few seconds of looking.

Have you ever been in the position of having to decide what to write on someone's gravestone? I love those memorial stones from past times which you sometimes find on church walls, which have a whole screed about what wonderful achievements someone could be celebrated for. Generally we go for something much simpler these days, a name, some dates and perhaps dearly beloved wife mother and grandmother ...

I often think how much more that tells you about who organised the stone rather than the, clearly cherished, person themselves.

My father-in-law wanted to have just 'priest' on his gravestone. That could be taken as just a descriptive word of his job. I think he probably saw it as going to the essence of who he was and the code by which he had lived his life.

There is no one person who knows the whole of us. As children we see our parents as those who care for us, make decisions for us and never know anything detailed about the romantic side of them, for instance, or their work lives.

Our siblings might know many details of our young selves but our lives tend to diverge as we get to adulthood. Few of us have friends who share every aspect of our lives – there are those we play sport with, those we work with.

Even our life partners don't know everything about us. And apart from the practicalities of how much time we can spend together, we keep secrets from them all – some for their good, probably more of them for our good – to keep hidden our misdoings, our mistakes, our foolishness, our shame.

What our lady at the well realised was that Jesus DID know everything about her – he knew why she'd made every bad decision she'd ever made, he knew when she had nearly given up, he knew who she'd loved the most – and that was a GOOD thing.

Standing before Jesus she realised that she didn't have to pretend, she didn't have to put on a brave face, she didn't have to hide anything. There were no secrets. And even knowing everything, she was still loved, and loved **PTO**

perfectly. In accepting that all knowing love, there is a great and other-worldly peace – living water.

Buoyed with confidence and excitement our lady at the well draws many to come and listen to Jesus so that they might find that peace too. She did it instinctively so great was Jesus's impact on her.

If you've not yet encountered God's love but today's story has made you wish that you had, then I would encourage you to start thinking about what to look out for to find signs of that love ... like you would if you wanted to start to learn about birdwatching for instance ... and if you'd like some tips then one of the clergy or lay leaders here would be happy to talk to you to point you in the right direction

If you have buried a moment of encounter safe inside you ready to deal with when you have a moment – then perhaps now is as good a time as any to take it out and ask what it all means.

If you have a deep well of living water inside you my challenge is to check whether you are sharing it or whether you are keeping it for yourself?

Amen