

Worship at Home 20 March

Welcome to Worship at Home for 20 March, the Third Sunday in Lent

Invitation to Worship - This is the day that the Lord has made: We will rejoice and be glad in it

Prayer - Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of this day, and of all days. Help us to use all our time wisely, and bring glory to you by our lives.

Our reading this time is John's Gospel chapter 4, verses 4 to 24

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?' Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' 'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

Reflection 'God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.' Those words of Jesus, which sometimes begin our Sunday service, seem quite incontrovertible, but in fact they are not. Let's look at their context. Jesus is having a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, on Samaritan territory. In Jesus' day Jews and Samaritans belonged to different religious and racial groups and did not get on. We tend to think of Samaritans as good because of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In it he contrasted him with the Jewish priest and Levite, who passed by on the other side and were not compassionate to the man who fell among thieves. But Jesus was making a point: his hearers being Jews would all be assuming that that they were okay, but Samaritans, of a different race and religion, were not. He tries to dispel their prejudice. And it would certainly be unusual in Jesus' day for him to sit beside a Samaritan woman and have a conversation with her. But he and his disciples had been making a short cut through Samaritan territory, and the disciples had gone off to buy some food, and he was just sitting by the well for a rest. The woman appeared and they had quite a long conversation, as we have just heard. But then it got a bit difficult when Jesus said, 'Go call your husband and come back.' She had to reply that she had no husband, which gave rise to Jesus' comment, that, yes, she had been divorced five times and was now in a relationship with a sixth man. The woman was finding the conversation embarrassing and decided to switch to another subject, religion, which she felt might be safer: Which is the place where people ought to worship – where you Jews worship? Is it in your temple in Jerusalem, or is it in our temple on Mount Gerizim? That gave rise to Jesus' reply. 'A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain (no doubt with a gesture to the nearby Mount Gerizim) nor in Jerusalem where we Jews worship. ... A time is coming and has now come when the true

worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.... God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.'

This may be very obvious, but there are implications for us now, today. There is a tendency for religious people to define themselves by what they are not, like this: 'We are nonconformists and not Anglicans.' or 'We are Protestants and not Catholics,' or 'we are Christians and not Jews or Muslims.' 'We are...' and so on. Would it be possible for us to regard all religions as a gateway to God so that we can worship God in spirit and in truth? Most of us are not ready to admit that, but it could perhaps seem to be the way in which Jesus' remarks to the Samaritan woman in that context are pointing.

And so we come to our hymn in Rejoice and Sing no. 99, 'All creatures of our God and King'.

All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice!
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Dear mother earth, who day by day
Unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
Let them His glory also show.
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

We come to our time of prayer. Let us pray

Uppermost in our minds at the moment will be the situation in Ukraine, and we begin with a prayer that the URC Daily Devotions sent out on Tuesday 1st March. It would still generally apply.

Prayer for Ukraine

God of all, with alarm and concern we bring before you the military intervention in Ukraine. In a world you made for peace and flourishing, we lament the use of armed force. We mourn every casualty of this conflict, every precious life extinguished by war. We pray comfort for those who grieve and those who are fearful. Hear our longing that leaders and nations will honour the worth of all people by having the courage to resolve conflict through dialogue. May all our human failings be transformed by your wonderful grace and goodness. We ask this in the name of Christ, the author of peace and sustainer of Creation. **Amen.**

We continue in prayer. Lord, there are so many crises going on the moment. We think particularly of those affected by the rising cost of petrol and diesel, owners and managers of transport companies, individuals having to decide which car journeys are essential and which are not. Make us all responsible stewards of the world's resources. Lord, **give wisdom to all.** Lord, we think of those affected by the cost of gas and electricity to their homes, which is all of us to a greater or lesser extent. But some are having to choose between keeping warm or feeding themselves and their families. We give thanks for the Food Banks and their staff and for the generosity of those who give to them. Lord, **give wisdom to all.** Lord, we think of those close to us, our families, fellow church members, and personal friends, who need our prayers: people bereaved, people ill, people awaiting a medical diagnosis, people worried about those close to them. We name them before you now...[pause]... Bless them and comfort them. Lord, **give wisdom to all.**

Lord, we know that you hear our prayers and will answer them in accord with your perfect will. Thank you. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen**

Revd Tony Coates. . .