



GOSPEL GOSSIP

The Woman at the Well

St John 4. 5-42

Sunday 8 March

Although there is officially no caste system in India today, the reality is very different. Dalits – untouchables – are still the lowest of the low, and considered sub-human. Although Samaritans in Jesus' time, such as the woman at the well, were not despised in the same way, they were still looked down on or ignored by Jews. So it was surprising, to say the least, to them if not us, that Jesus deigned to speak with the woman, asked a favour – a drink. It was a double snub to convention because this was a woman.

The woman may well have suppressed a wry chuckle to herself when Jesus made his request, thinking 'little does he know...' But he did – he knew everything. But that didn't stop him from asking her to be of service to her, and when she agreed, then told her that he was to the spirit what water was for the body – the source of life.

- Do you feel beneath God's radar – too insignificant, too 'dirty'?
- Would you be open to a request from Jesus?
- How would you react to one?
- Are you put off by thinking that you hold no secrets from God?
- If so, why?

In his conversation with the woman, Jesus discloses that God cannot be limited to place, time or people. No longer would he be God solely of the Jews. No longer would his worship be centred on Jerusalem. No longer would he be a God simply of the present, but eternal. This amazed the woman, who scuttled off to the village where she clearly her life-story was clearly well-known. Maybe because she was at the well by herself – usually a place of social gathering – she was even ostracised by her community. So intent was she about telling people what Jesus had said, she even left her bucket behind.

She was struck by Jesus' words, and realised that they weren't just for her ears alone, but that she had a duty to talk about what had happened. She began to wonder whether this was the prophet who was to come. Yet she wasn't perturbed by the fact that Jesus knew all about her, because she recognised her his compassion and implicit forgiveness. The result? The villagers went out and found Jesus and invited him back to stay with them for a few days. And he accepted.

- What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus tells the woman about?
- Is it something you think about, or are you waiting to be confronted with the concept?
- How can Jesus be the source of eternal refreshment?
- Has a third party ever spoken about such things with you – and what would you think/do if they did?
- Would you be prepared to invite Jesus back – how?

From a seeming question concerning basics, a profound conversation arose. Between strangers. Yet both were comfortable and accepting of the other. Jesus, talking with a sinful woman of another denomination; the woman talking with a male from the 'superior' Jews. Yet they were able to converse, and to the woman's eternal benefit. Her response, through joy, wonder – fear even – was not to keep it quiet, but openly acknowledging her nature to the community in which she lived, was convincing enough in her enthusiasm to be listened to by those around her, and also to inspire them. A lesson indeed for us all today.