

# *Jesus is the only source of eternal satisfaction*

a sermon preached on the  
*third Sunday of Lent*

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at

*st john's*

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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

*Almighty God and heavenly Father, as we open your word in the Gospel, we pray that you'd open our hearts, fill them with the knowledge of your will and give us the strength to do it.*

The Bible tells us that “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel of John, we learn that this word “became flesh” (1:14) in the person of Jesus-Christ, the Messiah, the promised King who came into the world to introduce a new era, a bit like the Internet has introduced a new way of life nowadays.

Indeed, something has changed since Jesus came 2000 years ago. Before, no one had ever seen God but now, “the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (1:14). In John 2, Jesus is the new wine, the *Beaujolais Nouveau* bringing the joy of an eternal salvation, the new temple in which we can enter to meet God, to become his children and to have eternal life. But who can have this life? The answer is to be found in one of the most famous verses in the Bible: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (3:16) In other words, *anyone* can have eternal life, whether you're a respected religious leader like Nicodemus or a rejected foreign woman like the Samaritan woman whom we've met in our Gospel reading this morning.

In this passage, Jesus is going to reveal himself to this woman as the only source of eternal satisfaction by doing two things – pouring on her supernatural water and knowledge.

- *Supernatural water* (v. 1-15)

In these verses, Jesus is on his way to Galilee and comes to a town in Samaria called Sychar, north of Jerusalem, not far from Nablus for those who have been to Israel before. It's about midday, it's hot, Jesus is tired and sits down by a well. Suddenly, a woman comes to draw water and Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman is surprised because she's a Samaritan woman, Jesus is a Jewish man and usually “Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (v. 9) for historical and theological reasons. This woman is even more surprised when Jesus tells her that he can give her living water: “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep [40-metre deep according to some sources]. Where can you get this living water? » (v. 11).

That's what we call a misunderstanding – Jesus isn't talking about natural water like Mount Franklin but about supernatural, spiritual water which can give eternal life (v. 13). Even if the Samaritan woman still doesn't understand the spiritual nature of this water at this stage, she'd love to drink from it: “Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” (v. 15) But before giving her this water, Jesus wants this woman to understand why she desperately needs it, which leads us to our second point.

- *Supernatural knowledge* (v. 16-26)

In verse 16, Jesus says something which has *apparently* nothing to do with what comes just before: “Go, call your husband and come back.” What is Jesus doing here? I think he's using his

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3

supernatural knowledge as a prophet (v. 19) to help the Samaritan woman understand why she desperately needs the water he's offering her.

This woman lives in a relational desert/no-man's land so to speak – she recognizes that she has no husband, which is true, but she can't hide the fact that she's had five husbands and that the man she's now living with is not her husband.

It was International Women's Day last Sunday but you don't have to be a woman to imagine how this woman feels. She's had five husbands which probably means that she's been abandoned by five different men who divorced her, or that all her husbands have died, in which case she's a widow. Can you imagine how lonely, empty, rejected, hurt and even guilty this woman feels? Why do you think she comes to draw water at noon (at the hottest time of the day)? Maybe because she doesn't want to see anybody because she's ashamed of living with a man who isn't her husband.

And maybe that's how you feel today for different reasons. Maybe you feel lonely, empty, rejected, hurt, ashamed or guilty. Maybe you feel angry because you've been betrayed by a friend, a work colleague, a member of your family. If that's the case, I'm really sorry and I know how painful broken relationships can be. But can I ask – from which water do you drink to quench your thirst for love, your desire to be loved and to love? From which source do you draw to fill your life with joy, peace, forgiveness and satisfaction as the Rollins Stones sing it (“I can't get no satisfaction”)?

In a famous speech, non-Christian American author David Foster Wallace warns us against the things of the world we worship and which can eat us alive:

If you worship money and things (...) you will never have enough (...) Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly (...) Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid (...) Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.<sup>2</sup>

If that's you, the only way to quench your thirst for love, to get satisfaction in this life is to hang on Jesus's every word in the Bible for he's our creator who has the words of eternal life (“Where else shall we go?”<sup>3</sup>)

As Augustin writes in his *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

So if your heart is restless, if you want to get satisfaction, come to Jesus in repentance and faith so you can have life to the full, eternal life which can start now, so you can know God and be loved, accepted and adopted as one of his children. But if we can be adopted as God's children, it's because Christ was rejected and abandoned. Do you remember the last words Jesus cried out just before dying on the cross? “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>4</sup> This cry of distress doesn't imply a separation/division within the Trinity – on the cross, Jesus was still fully man and fully God. What this cry implies is the pain and humiliation of the Son of God who “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross”<sup>5</sup> where he died for our sins.

So can I encourage to make the most of this time of the year (Lent) to reflect on the meaning of the death of Christ who calls his disciples to deny themselves and to follow him<sup>6</sup>? If you've been a Christian for a number of years, why don't you make the most of Lent to follow Christ by putting into practice one of the 20 suggestions you can find in the Contact from last month? For example: just like Jesus did, tell God honestly how you feel, or do something less for yourself and more for others, avoid TV for a week unless you have no other way to know what's going on with the coronavirus. And if you're not a Christian, why don't you respond to Christ's calling by coming to him in repentance and faith today?

I'd like to finish by quoting Malcolm Muggeridge, a British journalist who used to work for MI6 and became a Christian later in his life. Malcom Muggeridge was a famous and successful man who earned a lot of money and whose writings had an impact on his time. But this is what he's telling us and begs us to believe:

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<sup>2</sup> David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*: <https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>

<sup>3</sup> John 6:68

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:23

(...) multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing (...) measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.<sup>7</sup>

*Lord, may your word live in us.*

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Bruce Milne in *The Message of John*, "The Bible Speaks Today" (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 84.