

## Reflection for February 28th, 2021.

Dear Church Family, and Choir,

The first four sermons for Lent are based on the Creation story in Genesis. Last week Ian preached on Light.

Today our reading would be Genesis Chapter 1, verses 6-8, and the theme is 'Water'.

As I write this, the sun is streaming down, and the wet grey days we have endured for so long already seem a distant memory. Most winters we have to suffer what appears to be far too much rain, and parts of the country invariably suffer bad floods. But come the summer we are short of water again, and most years we have hosepipe bans imposed upon us.

We tend to grumble about our climate, but we should be thankful that we don't live in a country that suffers months, even years, of devastating droughts. Crops fail season after season and animals die that are essential to people's livelihoods.

I know that climate change is now an important topic for us all, and I hope to reflect on that in my zoom sermon next Sunday.

For everyone water is essential to life. We can live for quite a long time without food, but we cannot survive for very long without water.

I remember so clearly hearing a story on the radio one day. It was several years ago, but it was so powerful that it has remained with me. It was about a group of men who were incarcerated in a filthy prison; I think it was in Iraq, but I can't exactly remember.

Suffice it to say that these men were locked up in appalling conditions. They were in an overcrowded cell with no sanitation, no food and very little water. I seem to remember that they were political prisoners.

One of them, the man who told the story, was a doctor. Another prisoner was in a very bad way and in the most terrible pain from some stomach complaint. He crawled up to the doctor, groaning in agony and begged him to do something to relieve the pain. The doctor was helpless as he had no medical supplies, not even an aspirin, and all he could offer was a little water.

He gave some water to the sick man, and managed to procure an extra supply from a sympathetic guard. Miraculously, the terrible pain abated, and the sick man was cured.

The doctor said he had always believed that water was the one element or ingredient that can sustain, relieve, cure and restore life.

We know that Jesus called Himself the Light of the world. In January the Old Testament reading was from Genesis Chapter 1, and we touched on the fact that Jesus named Himself the Light of the world.

Now we can confirm that Jesus also offered those who believed in Him the gift of “Living Water”.

The story comes from John’s Gospel in Chapter 4 starting at verse 4. Jesus and His disciples find themselves journeying through Samaria. Jesus was exhausted from travelling, and sat down to rest by Jacob’s well, while His disciples went on into the town to get food.

A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink. She responded with surprise that He, a Jew, should deign to ask her, a Samaritan for a drink. For historical reasons, the Jews hated and despised the Samaritans. But we should not be surprised that for Jesus, these enmities were irrelevant.

Instead, He told the woman that if she had any idea who he was, she could have asked him for ‘living water’. She asked him to tell her where this ‘living water’ came from. Of course, she took Jesus literally, just as Nicodemus had, when Jesus was, in fact, talking spiritually.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that everyone who drank the water from the well would be thirsty again, but whoever drank the water He gave would never thirst, because it would become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Interestingly, the Jews had another way of using, or translating the word: 'water'. They often spoke of the 'thirst' of the soul for God; and they spoke of quenching that thirst with 'living water'. In fact, Jesus was not using words that were bound to be misunderstood; He was using terms that anyone with spiritual insight would have understood perfectly.

I expect you have all experienced that wonderful feeling of refreshment you get, on a very hot summer's day, when you hold your hands under a tap flowing with icy cold running water? That is the physical equivalent of the spiritual refreshment your soul receives from the living water Jesus Christ can supply.

Water needs to flow to stay pure. Still water becomes stagnant. We need to drench our souls with the spiritual living water of Christ.

St Augustine said: "Our hearts are restless, till they find rest in thee."

We can all find comfort, rest and refreshment in Christ through the Holy Spirit, especially at this stressful and difficult time, when, even after a whole year has elapsed, we are all still living in a kind of unsettling limbo.

A prayer by the medieval mystic, Hildegard of Bingen:

Holy Spirit, giving life to all life,  
moving all creatures, root of all things, washing them clean,  
wiping out their mistakes, healing their wounds,  
You are our true life, luminous, wonderful,  
awakening the heart from its ancient sleep.

And a Gaelic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you,  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.  
Amen.

May you all keep safe, and know the healing power of Jesus Christ.

I send you all my warmest good wishes, Sarah.