

Sunday 8 March – Third Sunday of Lent

Sermon by The Venerable Kate Peacock Archdeacon of Stansted

As it is café church from St. Luke's, there is no sermon from there for this week. Instead, the Diocesan sermon is shown below and can be listened to at [Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford](#)

What's on your Bucket List?

I wonder what's on your bucket list? You know that list of things that you want to do before you die? Or before you well, kick the bucket?

Maybe a world cruise? Maybe, a trip to the Pyramids or the Arctic? Maybe to conquer a fear and go skydiving? Maybe you have literary ambition and want to write a book or a poem? Maybe you want to own your own home or fall in love? Lists vary, from the fun and outrageous to the meaningful and profound.

I wonder what would have been on the Samaritan woman's bucket list. We don't know a lot about her but we do know she took her bucket and visited the well at noon. Hot and dusty. Not the normal time to go. Maybe she didn't want to meet anyone on the way, maybe her life was shunned and shamed by her community. We also know she had five husbands – maybe this was the cause of the shunning and local gossip. Maybe she had been bereaved or mistreated. I wonder if her list would include finding respect or lasting love or just something, well, a little bit easier.

She gets to this well, that's been there since the time of Jacob, and in fact is still there and you can still drink the fresh sweet water. In her day it was in the middle of nowhere, and she arrives bucket in hand. A regular and laborious task – one she would have done thousands of times before. But, this time was different. This time she met Jesus – the one who told her everything she had ever done. This is a lengthy encounter of humour and banter, theology and religion. And ultimately of her finding hope and healing and purpose.

In the exchange with Jesus about the water, and his lack of bucket, Jesus tells her she could ask for not just drinking water, from which you will need a steady supply as your thirst will return, but living water from which you will never be thirsty. Bemused, she asks for it to save her from her daily

errand. Jesus asks about her husband and the conversation moves on to the complexity of her situation of five husbands; is he a prophet she asks?

No, the old ways are ending and the mountains that are important to your people and mine will be no longer be the places for worship. But the worship of the Father must be of spirit and truth – the woman announces she knows that the Messiah is coming - and then the climax of this extraordinary exchanges comes. Jesus said to her, I am he, the one who is speaking to you.

The woman went out and told the town what had happened, invited them to come and see and many believed because of her.

She went to that well on that hot day and noon, with a bucket but no bucket list. She had no sense of what she needed in her life. Her's was a life of hidden places, whispers, gossip and I imagine trauma and distress. Something has happened to each of those five husbands.

Something had no doubt happened to her too. There is no talk of children – was she deemed barren? Was she regarded as not fulfilling the role of women? Was she shunned and shamed by whatever her story is?

But, courageously and boldly, she did what Jesus had done to the first disciples – invited them to come and see. She says to her town, her neighbours, those who knew her shame – come and see. She proclaimed Jesus. John in his Gospel is inviting us to come and see – see who this Jesus is. And in the following pages the word made flesh, the light that shines in the darkness and the well of living water is made clear. He is the Messiah. The one who saves.

John, in his Gospel, uses water as a powerful image throughout. So far in his Gospel we have the water of baptism, the water that becomes wine at the wedding at Cana, the living waters at this well, the waters of healing at Bethesda, the waters that washed the dusty feet of the disciples, and the water that eventually flowed from his side at the crucifixion, after he had proclaimed his thirst.

This water, in all these cases is the living water of which Jesus speaks. The water that brings newness, transformation and healing. The water that washes away an old life of shame and sin and offers deep, profound cleansing and relief from the burden of shame. The shame that weighed down the woman as she lugged her bucket to and from the well, the shame

that meant she did this in the heat of the day, the shame that meant she walked alone, the shame that saw her shunned from her community. The shame of believing she was not good, or loved, or lovely or worthy. The shame that isolated her from friends and neighbours. She asked Jesus for that living water to save herself from the drudgery of carrying her bucket. And on that day she walked to the well, she had an empty bucket, and an inner emptiness that Jesus saw. She seems like she did not know her worth or her purpose. Jesus gave her that – he poured grace and love - living water into that bucket – living water that cleansed her from her shame. The water of baptism, the water that becomes abundant wine, the water of healing and the water of Christ himself.

So, again, what is on your bucket list – maybe this time look beyond the cruise or the holiday and look to filling your bucket with grace and healing and love from the God of all love and all hope, who cleanses us from all things and wipes every tear from our eyes. And in these 100 days of prayers as we pray for the life of the church, let that water of faith gush up and give you and the whole church the fullness of life. Life and purpose in Christ Jesus, who had no need of a bucket. Amen.