

From the PA's Desk

Alpha: Next week, "Why Did Jesus Die?"

Talk summary:

- The cross is the symbol for Christianity. Why?
- 'The Son of God' – that is, Jesus – 'loved me and gave himself for me'. If you had been the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for *you*. He loves *you* that much.
- Why did Jesus die?
- The problem: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' We've all fallen short of God's standard
- Sin is powerful: (4 P's – pollution, power, penalty, partition) – it destroys our lives and separates us from God
- Jesus came to die for us – to take our sin upon himself – so that we can be free to have a relationship with God
- What are the results of the cross (pollution is cleansed, power is broken, penalty has been paid, partition is removed): Relationship with God and with others restored – forgiveness is possible.

Gospel Today:

Today's Gospel reading about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Genesis 29) is rather long but filled with theological and spiritual insight. Here Jesus is passing through Samaria where the despised Samaritans live on his way to Galilee. Actually, when most Jews were traveling from northern to southern Israel (Samaria was between them), they often would travel around Samaria rather than go through it. Jesus is hot and thirsty, so he approaches a well where a lone woman is. As bad as it was for any Jew to talk to a Samaritan, it was even worse for a single man to talk to a single woman alone. Jesus was one who often laid aside silly social customs if it kept people from engaging each other. Instead, Jesus asks the woman for a drink, and she is flabbergasted.

Today's Gospel reading reminded Matthew's community of Jewish converts about the story of Jacob and Rachel from the Well Story in Genesis 29.

In the original Hebrew story, Jacob sees Rachel at a well for the first time around midday when the sun is hottest, and falls head over heels for her. Jacob runs to Rachel who must be thirsty standing in the midday sun, and tries to remove the well's lid which was kept on it during the day to prevent evaporation. The people standing nearby shout at him that the well cannot be opened before the sun goes down, but Jacob does not care. He only cares about Rachel and her need to drink life-giving water.

When Matthew recalled this story about Jesus and the woman at the well, the community of Jewish converts must have immediately thought about the Jacob's Well story. The point of the story for Matthew and his community is clear. Jesus loves all God's people, and especially those we consider outsiders and not worthy of God's friendship. Jesus has but one desire for all people, and that is for them to become fully alive in God.

Jesus not only talks to the Samaritan woman, but he engages her in a theological discussion about the things which bring people to fullness of life. They banter back and forth, and Jesus makes the point that the water he gives provides "eternal life" from which she will never thirst again.

Throughout all our readings today, water is the predominant symbol. The early Christians understood this symbolism extremely well. In the first reading, God saves our desert-bound ancestors by bringing forth water from the rock at Horeb. In the second reading Paul speaks of love "poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

The theme of all three readings today is clear. Water sustains life. It also cleans away the grime and filth that can diminish and destroy life. In the waters of baptism, the sins that alienate us from God are washed away and we are reborn in the Spirit of compassion and community.

Jesus is the one who tears down walls and breaks down barriers that divide people from one another and from God. Indeed it is Good News for all of us!