

## Sermon at Parish Mass, Lent 3 2026, St Andrew's Alexandra Park

Revd Matthew Duckett

Exodus 17:1-7

Romans 5.1-11

John 4:5-42

What do we most deeply desire? Our gospel reading this week is a story of desire, but as we read it our understanding of desire is transformed.

Jesus begins with bodily desire, for water. It is midday, he is tired out by his journey, and he is sitting by a well. He is thirsty, and asks a woman who comes to the well to draw water.

But not just any woman. She is a Samaritan, and the story assumes the ancient estrangement between the Jewish and Samaritan people. But it seems that she is also estranged in some way from her own people. At that time and place, in a hot climate, the women of a town would go together to fetch water early, before the day grew hot. But here she is, on her own, at midday.

She appears to be someone who is shunned and marginalised by her own community. We learn from her encounter with Jesus of her complicated relationship history, and perhaps her community has judged her for this. But in an age when women were regarded as the property of men, we might wonder what agency she had in her own life.

In our own day, the “me too” movement empowers women who have been the victims of abuse to tell their stories and bring about change. And Jesus in this story empowers this woman. In all the Gospels, she is the first person to whom Jesus says that he is the Messiah. And because of that she becomes the messenger to her own people, an evangelist to tell them that the Messiah has come. From being on the margins, she is brought in to the centre, empowered and given agency in drawing others, even the people who have excluded her, into the new life that Jesus offers.

Jesus uses this situation, and his natural thirst, to explore a deeper thirst, both our need for God, and, even more than that, his desire for our faith. As he did with Nicodemus last week, Jesus speaks of the life that is “from above”, the life of the Spirit. This is the living water Jesus gives, which becomes in those who receive it “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”.

Jesus says, “The hour is coming when you [plural] will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem [but]... in spirit and truth”. It is the Spirit that gives life, and the Spirit who expresses God’s desire for us. “The Father *seeks* such as these to worship him.” God’s generous desire is to share eternal life with us, the life of the Spirit. This is how our desire is transformed. It is God’s desire for us that turns our desire towards God. Like a magnet working on iron filings. Jesus asks for a drink from the woman, but what he really thirsts for, draws out from her, is her response, her faith.

Jesus then speaks more of his own desire, his hunger, not for earthly food, but to do the will of the Father by gathering in the harvest of all peoples into eternal life. “Look around you”, he says, “and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting”, just as the Samaritan townsfolk are emerging and coming towards him. Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus will say, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” – but here it is already happening as the people converge on him. And he stays and teaches them, resulting in their confession of faith. His desire for them evokes their desire for him whom they realise to be “the Saviour of the world”.

God’s desire for us, when we become aware of it, uncovers our deepest desire for God, which reorders and converts our lesser desires. The desire for God leads us to the living source, the One who desires us, the spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

Lent is a time to return to the Lord, to rediscover our need for God, who is our deepest and truest desire. It is a time for the conversion of desire, so that all our lesser desires line up and converge on the One who is their source. It is a time to be refreshed from the living waters, opened to us by our baptism, the eternal life that we eat and drink in every Eucharist. And the great liturgies of Holy Week and Easter invite us in a particular way to encounter once again the mystery of God’s love, by which we have been reborn.

Why are we here this morning? I hope because in some measure we desire to meet Jesus in the Eucharist, we desire to be fed and refreshed by him in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.

Today's Gospel reading invites us to see that the desire of Jesus for us is prior to our own desire for him. In our baptism it is his desire that opens for us the spring of water gushing up to eternal life. In the Eucharist Jesus hungers for the guests to be gathered to his feast. He thirsts for their faith.

And in awakening our desire for him, he gives us ourselves. We should not be afraid that giving ourselves fully to Jesus will diminish who we are. Rather, like the Samaritan woman, we are sought out and found by the One who tells us who we are, the story of everything we have ever done.

And we are told this truly for the first time because Jesus looks at us, not through the eyes of judgement and casting out, but through the eyes of mercy and love. Like the woman who was brought from the margins to the centre, empowered and made an agent of transformation, we receive the gift of our true selves in Jesus.

He desires our desire with all his love. He thirsts for our faith more than for any earthly water. He hungers to gather in the harvest of all peoples to eternal life.

Lent is a time for the conversion of our desire. Not through repressing our lesser desires, but through rediscovering God's desire for us, and allowing

that to awaken our desire for God. So that our whole being is realigned and converges on God. Who is in truth our deepest desire and our highest good, the spring of water within us gushing up to eternal life.