

3rd Sunday in Lent 8 March 2026

John 4: 5-42

St James Church, Shirley, St John's Church Tidbury Green Lent and Bible

Well, Lent invites us to slow down enough to notice what we often rush past. This year, as we know, the Church of England invites us to Draw Near, and this week we're reminded that Scripture is not simply a book to rush through but a place to stop and encounter. It's a story we're drawn into, where God meets us, surprises us, and sometimes, hopefully, unsettles us.

Most of us have parts of the Bible we know well — popular stories, treasured passages that have shaped our faith or comforted us in hard times. But Scripture also contains places we rarely explore, voices we hardly hear, and themes we've never fully noticed. When we dare to step into those unfamiliar places, something happens: our imagination stretches, our understanding widens and we discover that God has more to show us than we realised.

Today's readings invite exactly that kind of discovery. They draw us to moments of deep human thirst: physical, spiritual, emotional, and to the God who meets people in those places. And nowhere is that clearer than in John's gospel, where a simple request for a drink becomes the doorway into a life-changing conversation.

The Woman at the Well

The conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well opens up one of the richest threads in John's gospel: the theme of water. John uses water repeatedly to reveal who Jesus is and what he brings. It's there at Cana, where ordinary water becomes finest wine. It appears in Jesus' teaching about being born from above. Later it becomes the means of healing, the sign of humble service in foot washing and finally the water that flows from Jesus' pierced side: a moment many see as John's prefiguring of Baptism and Eucharist. Even on the cross Jesus says, "I am thirsty," and the

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gospel ends by the sea, with the risen Christ calling his friends back into life. Water, water everywhere.

So when Jesus speaks of "*living water*," the Samaritan woman hears only the literal meaning. Her religious tradition recognised only the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures; books where water is plentiful but almost always physical. It's only in the prophets, the psalms and the wisdom writings that water begins to carry symbolic depth: streams in the desert, wells of salvation, rivers of justice to name three.

Jesus invites her imagination to go beyond what her Scriptures had yet revealed, opening her to a God more abundant, more life-giving and more present than she had dared to hope. Scripture itself becomes a well, one that deepens as we draw from it.

'Knowing the Word'

Friday's Draw Near reflection, Knowing the Word, invited us to think honestly about the parts of Scripture we know well and the parts we barely touch. Most of us will have characters, books, stories and themes that have comforted us in hard times, inspired us and illuminate it God, life and our worldly outlook for us.

But the booklet reminded us that the Bible is far broader and richer than what any of us know.

That's one reason our worship pairs Old Testament and New Testament readings. Today's pairing shows how different parts of Scripture illuminate one another. One habit we should always get into when reading something from the New Testament is to ask, how does this relate to the Old Testament. First Christians weren't creating something new - they were continuing a story and showing its fulfilment.

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But the reflection also encouraged us to notice which books or themes we rarely explore, and to let God speak to us through them. That's exactly what happens in today's gospel: the Samaritan woman's understanding is shaped by a limited portion of Scripture, and it's only when Jesus draws her deeper that she discovers truths she had never imagined.

The Samaritan woman's response

Before we leave the woman at the well, it feels important — especially this weekend — to pause and notice her significance. Today is International Women's Day, a day that celebrates the achievements of women across the world and also names the inequalities, injustices and burdens that women continue to face.

When Ruth mentioned this to me and I looked into it I was staggered to see some of the appalling statistics on inequality of justice, and lack of rights for women across the globe. I encourage you to have a look at the website if you can:

[International women's day](#)

So into this John tells us more about this Samaritan women.

She is not named but In John's gospel, the unnamed characters are often those held in highest honour: the mother of Jesus, never called Mary; the beloved disciple, never identified as John. To be unnamed in John is to be honoured and to stand for many as a good example. And this woman stands for countless women whose stories are complex, misunderstood or overlooked.

We don't know the details of her five marriages. It may be symbolic — five husbands reflecting the five books of the Scriptures. It may be literal — a string of bereavements, or divorces she had no power to prevent, or a mixture of both. In her world, women had little say over marriage or divorce. Whatever the truth, she has almost

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certainly lived a life marked by disappointment, grief and the judgement of others. She comes to the well at noon, alone, carrying more than just a water jar.

And yet she is the one to whom Jesus reveals himself more clearly than almost anyone else in the gospels. She becomes the first evangelist in John, the first to bring her whole community to Christ. Her story is not one of shame but of dignity and faith and hope

On this International Women's Day, her encounter with Jesus invites us to honour the stories of women like her, and to recognise how Christ continues to meet women today with the same compassion, truth and life-giving grace. If only society would follow suit – we, and I include the Church, have a long way to go!

The Response

This week's reflections have also invited us to engage with Scripture in a way that goes beyond information — to let it shape how we see God, ourselves, and the world. The Samaritan woman shows us what that looks like. She arrives at the well with a certain understanding of faith, but as she talks with Jesus, her perspective shifts. Her questions deepen. Her imagination opens. A simple conversation becomes a moment of revelation.

The same can happen for us when we allow ourselves to “converse” with Jesus as we read Scripture — not rushing, not skimming, but reading with openness, curiosity, and prayer. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promises will lead us into all truth, meets us in that space. Familiar passages speak in new ways. Unfamiliar ones become places of encounter. Scripture becomes formation rather than mere knowledge.

One way to begin is through Lectio Divina — what Thursday's reflection called “eating the Word.” It's a slow, prayerful way of

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reading: Take a short passage, read it once slowly, pause and read it again slowly, pause again and read it a third time slowly - noticing which word or phrase or emotion comes to the surface whilst you've been reading it. I'm very happy to chat with you about that if you wish. I find it deeply illuminating.

And over time, it opens us to the same kind of transformation the Samaritan woman experienced — a deeper, clearer, more life-giving encounter with Christ.

This week

As we continue our journey through Lent, may we dare to draw nearer to Christ by drawing nearer to his Word. Not rushing, not skimming but allowing Scripture to become a place of encounter, a sort of well from which living water still flows.

My encouragement to you this week is simple: take a moment, choose a passage, sit with it, and let Jesus speak. The God who met a woman at a well will meet us too, offer clarity, courage and life in all its fullness. May we be as open as she was to receive it. Amen

Rev'd Richard Haynes 3rd Sunday in Lent 8 March 2026