

**8 March Sermon, 9.30am Eucharist**  
**Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42**  
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In the past couple of years, I've become increasingly interested in spiritual discipline, and how a discipline rooted in faith might help me discern God's will. And also, how it can connect me to others: to my neighbours, and perhaps to strangers. The Christian theologian Richard Foster writes in his renowned book *Celebration of Discipline*, that "*The Spiritual Disciplines...are meant to bring the abundance of God into our lives.*"

One habit I incorporated into my daily routine is a short prayer before meals. I spent some time looking for a prayer that is practical and meaningful, and I came across a widely used one that struck me with its simplicity and depth. You might know it - it goes like this: "*For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful and keep us always mindful of the needs of others.*" I've kept this habit of saying this prayer before meals, and from time to time, I reflect on its meaning. Three things come up: simplicity, gratitude and mindfulness of the needs of others. Lent, I think, is a time to explore these more deeply. And when we allow ourselves to think with these ideas—simplicity, gratitude and mindfulness of the needs of others—our attention is naturally drawn beyond our own tables to the wider world.

It is heartbreaking to witness or hear in the news stories of families who cannot provide their children with safety. On airplanes, we hear the sensible instruction to secure our own oxygen mask before helping others, but when someone depends on you, that instruction becomes far harder to imagine in practice. One cannot help but think families affected by global inequalities and conflict, experiencing the unimaginable pain of being unable to provide their children or dependents with food and water.

Water is very central in today's readings. And it is hard not to think about contemporary struggles surrounding access to water. For example, a 2025 study by the World Health Organisation shows that 1 in 4 people, which is 2.1 billion people globally – still lack access to safe drinking water.

In our first reading, the people brought out of Egypt blamed Moses for their thirst, for there was no water in Rephidim. Moses is a leader who serves with humility, and it must have been incredibly difficult for him to see the people he led suffering, and to feel the weight of their suffering. He cries out to God for help. And God answers by telling him to take the staff with which he struck the Nile, to strike the rock, and water flows. Now, it is hard to see how exactly we might connect this story up to our present day. It may even seem unfair or perhaps inappropriate to think of this alongside communities suffering water scarcity today for whom there is no miraculous solution. What lesson can we take from it then? As always, Jesus helps us better understand the deeper meanings of our Old Testament reading.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman. He asks her for water. This encounter might seem like an ordinary encounter but in its own time it was anything but ordinary. A Jewish man speaking to a woman directly was unacceptable. A Jew asking something of a Samaritan was unthinkable. And the woman herself, because of her history, was regarded as a social outsider. Her surprise is clear: *“How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”* Jesus responds: *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”*

The water Jesus is talking about here is different than the water we drink. It is living water, the spiritual sustenance of a life-giving relationship with God. When the disciples return, they too are astonished that Jesus was speaking with her. Then they urged him to eat but Jesus uses that moment to teach: *“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work”*.

Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman returns to the city and tells everyone about her encounter with Jesus. And because of her testimony, many people believed in Jesus. Once again in Scripture, a woman, moreover a social outcast, becomes an evangelist. A Samaritan, a woman. Someone whose life had been judged and dismissed. Her deep need of being recognised of worthy of respect is fulfilled in this encounter with Jesus, which not only transformed her, but led many in her community towards faith in Jesus. This is the radical welcome of Christ and this is just a glimpse of the promise of the living water that breaks boundaries. And this is the flow of grace that still moves through the world, helping us to be mindful of the needs of others.

The message of our Gospel reading invites us to think about simplicity, gratitude, and mindfulness of the needs of others. Simplicity, in appreciating the food and water we have. Gratitude for the promise of living water and the presence of the Holy Spirit. And mindfulness of the needs of others, physically or emotionally.

The spiritual disciplines we practice – whether a prayer before a meal, being involved in the life of the church, or anything that we mindfully add to our daily routines—all these will help us remember God’s presence and love. I pray these disciplines help strengthen the life of our beautiful church and guide people along the path of Jesus. And I pray that these spiritual disciplines nurture in us simplicity, gratitude, and a deep mindfulness of the needs of others.

Amen