

**Sunday 23.09.07 11am Harvest.**

**Turn on the Tap – Water for Life (John 4 The Message).**

As our focus is water this morning I thought I would spend some time finding out about the properties of this precious commodity we call H<sub>2</sub>O. With apologies to the scientists present this morning (please be forgiving of the gross oversimplifications that will follow) I dug around in my brain for what I could remember from chemistry at school and with a little bit of help from Google I came up with the following:

Water is special because it is found in three states: gas, liquid and solid, and its solid state (ice) is less dense than the liquid state – and so ice floats. And that means that when ponds freeze, they freeze from the top down allowing fish and other creatures to survive lower down in the water.

Water is special because it has a high heat specificity. That means you can heat it and heat it before it gets really hot. Try heating a mug of water in the microwave. Then try a mug of milk – it boils over way before the water !! Being able to absorb loads of heat is a very useful property. It makes water a brilliant coolant.

Water is special because it has a high surface tension and it can support things that are heavier than itself.

Water is special because it is the universal solvent – most things will mix with it and dissolve in it.

Water is special because (and I don't need a text book or internet search engine to tell me this) we cannot survive without it.

Did you know that by the time you start to feel thirsty your body is already dehydrated ?

Jesus, in the story we just read, began by asking the woman at the well for a drink of water. It was about physical need. He was obviously tired and thirsty, dehydrated. But by the end of the conversation the focus has changed from physical to spiritual thirst, and Jesus talks about fresh living water, gushing fountains of endless life. He offers the woman spiritual refreshment.

And so this morning I invite us to take a few minutes to think about physical need and spiritual need.

Here in the West our physical needs are met abundantly. How many times in our lives have we not had access to clean water ? (It was a major catastrophe recently when a sewerage station flooded and drinking water became contaminated.)

But how many feel thirsty spiritually ? How many are so dry, so dehydrated, they don't even know it ? They feel rotten inside but can't identify what's wrong ?

Spiritual dehydration doesn't seem to be a respecter of class or status or wealth. In fact the more famous you are the more susceptible you appear to be. Listen to interviews with celebrities who've gone off the rails at the height of their careers. There seems to be an overarching theme of dissatisfaction with wealth and fame followed by a seeking of something meaningful in life, and people try all sorts !

Over the summer I went to a Yazz concert. For those of you who missed the eighties for whatever reason, 'Yazz and the plastic population' were famous for the hit 'the only way is up'. (Resist the temptation to break into song!!)

Yazz has reinvented herself as a Christian singer- songwriter. She spoke about being at the top of her career, world famous, but feeling empty. By her own admission she tried everything to get some sort of meaning and satisfaction from life. Eventually after trying everything else she tried Jesus. She had been utterly spiritually dehydrated, but in finding Jesus she was refreshed.

In the 'two thirds world' there is serious need for physical refreshment. To be dehydrated is a daily possibility. We've heard about the struggles for clean water this morning, and the devastating effects of not having it. Something we probably already know, but choose to put it to one side because its too awful to think about on a daily basis. We're upset by those images, but – hey- what can we do ?

Water features often in the Bible. In lands that were often dry and desert places, where water is so precious, the difference between survival and not, it's not surprising that water is a recurring theme. From the parting of the red sea, to drought, subsequent crop failure, famine and economic catastrophe, to baptism and new life, to the telling of this story of the woman at the well.

There are lots of surprising things that happen in this story, that normally we would draw out as being the focus of the passage – Jesus sitting out at noon. That was surprising because it was daft to be out in such heat . Jesus talking to a woman. That was surprising because socially it just was not done. Jesus talking to a Samaritan (and visa versa). Jews and Samaritans avoided each other at all costs such was their dislike and contempt for one another. Jesus knowing the womans background, Jesus telling her who he was, etc. So many things that make this story different.

And I want to note and remember that they're there, but I don't want them to obscure this two-fold theme of physical and spiritual thirst and need that emerges from the story.

Jesus tired and thirsty, sat down at the well and asked for a drink. A little later he said to the woman 'Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst - not ever. The water I give will be an Artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.'

Physical and spiritual need is often separated out – and that is almost certainly an unhelpful thing to do.

Medicine is beginning to acknowledge the benefits of more holistic approaches to treatment of illness, for example. Research into pet therapy has shown that being visited in hospital by a pet dog or cat can bring benefits that medication cannot.

If you are a pet owner perhaps you can identify with that. If I'm a bit fed up I sit down on the settee and my cat sits next to me. I give her a stroke on her head and she settles down and purrs away, and in no time everything is back into perspective. I feel comforted by the cats presence and purr, she is happy because she's had some attention and suspects that a tasty cat treat is about to be administered from the cupboard by a grateful owner – and all's well with the world. Clearly if you can't stand cats then its a sure fire way to raise your blood pressure !!

Do we divide up spiritual and physical need and care for one but not the other ? Traditionally there has been a divide between types of Christian as to which we go for.

The more evangelical minded (and these are very broad categories remember) have tended to go for spiritual need. Win people for the kingdom and physical need will not be important or will be miraculously provided for.

The other camp is liberal. Social action is the overriding thing. Address people's needs and that is doing God's will.

Forgive these gross caricatures, but there is some truth in them. Neither social action nor spiritual concern on its own is enough. A combination is what's needed.

On the bit of the DVD that we haven't watched this morning Samaritans Purse make it clear that as a Christian organisation they seek to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the people they come into contact with. They describe it as 'Christ in the action from beginning to end'.

In the village of Sychar, lives were never the same again following the visit from Jesus and his disciples. Christ was in the action from beginning to end. Beginning with physical need and ending with spiritual refreshment.

The challenge to us this morning is to be a people who care and respond to the physical and spiritual needs of those whose lives are a struggle because they do not have the resources that we simply take for granted. So that in villages where ever there is need, Christ will be present in the words and actions of Samaritans Purse workers and all those other agencies that work to share the gospel in word and action. So that as at Sychar, the people will never be the same again. Their spiritual and physical needs will be met.

Perhaps we feel crippled by the size of the task in hand. It's just too great and so we shut our minds to it.

A man was walking along the beach with his son, and as he walked he came across a whole load of star fish that had been washed up on the beach. The man picked one up and carried it down to the sea, then he walked back up the beach, picked up a star fish and carried it down to the sea, then he came back for another one and carried it back to the sea. Dad, what are you doing said his son. There must be thousands of starfish here. What's the point ? You'll never make a difference. But the man carried on. As he walked backwards and forwards to the water and back he said no son you're wrong. We can make a difference. I just did, to that one and that one and that one.....

We can make a difference, even right here in leafy Lichfield, middle England. We can pray, as we already have (and continue praying) and we can give.

Let's play our part in providing spiritual and physical refreshment to those who are dehydrated.

### **Sunday 23.09.07 House Group Notes**

#### **Turn on the Tap – Water for Life (John 4:1-42. The Message).**

Jesus began by asking the woman at the well for a drink of water. He was obviously tired and thirsty, dehydrated even. But during the conversation the focus changed from physical to spiritual thirst, and Jesus talked about fresh living water; gushing fountains of endless life. He offered the woman, who desperately needed it, some spiritual refreshment.

Lets consider physical need versus spiritual need. Here in the West our physical needs are met abundantly. We take clean water for granted. But how many feel thirsty spiritually ? In the 'two thirds world' there is serious need for physical refreshment. To be dehydrated is a daily possibility.

Samaritans Purse (and other Christian aid organisations) seek to meet both spiritual and physical needs of people they come into contact with. They describe this as being 'Christ in the action from beginning to end'.

Water features often in the Bible. In lands that were often dry and desert places, where water is so precious, the difference between survival and not, it's not surprising that water is a recurring theme. From the parting of the red sea, to drought, subsequent crop failure, famine and economic catastrophe, to baptism and new life, to the telling of this story of the woman at the well.

Life was never the same for the people in the village of Sychar following Jesus' visit. What began as a request to meet physical need ended in them finding spiritual refreshment and 'gushing fountains of endless life'.

### **For Discussion.**

- Think about some events in the Bible that feature water. What are the significant ones for you, and why ?
  
- In the story of the woman at the well Jesus breaks a number of social taboos (talking to a woman, talking to a Samaritan, etc). Why do you think he did that ?  
Are there any taboos that you think Jesus would break today ?  
Are there any that should be broken?
  
- Jesus says, 'The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life'.  
What does this mean for you ?
  
- Is it possible to strike a balance between meeting physical and spiritual needs ?  
Which concerns you more ?
  
- How do you respond to the many charities requesting donations ?  
Is it desirable/possible to prioritise giving ?