

LENT 2017

Proclaim Westminster
building missionary parishes



**LENTEN PROGRAMME 2017
THIRD WEEK
“Meeting Mercy”
The Woman at the Well**



OPENING PRAYER:

Grant, almighty God, through our yearly observance of Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE – Living our Faith

In 2007, a remarkable charity opened its doors for the first time in a converted hotel just north of the City of London. The charity, women@thewell, was inspired by an equally remarkable Religious Sister, Sister Lynda Dearlove, who for ten years had been working in the East End of London with women involved in human trafficking, prostitution, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and with physical and mental health issues. The charity envisions a society in which all women are empowered to achieve their full potential free from discrimination, abuse and neglect. The mission and aim is to help vulnerable women make choices and changes in their lives to break out of the multiple cycles of chaos, abuse and social exclusion that they seem to be locked into. Employees of the charity and volunteers offer support in accessing appropriate services, practical assistance in getting the best help needed, training in life skills and one-to-one support for a woman's health and wellbeing. Each and every woman matters to them.

One woman, sharing her testimony of how women@thewell helped her to break free, says: "Where I was 4 years ago to where I am now: I was sticking needles in my arm 4 years ago. I was lying on a bus and waking up on the floor with people stepping over me. Now it's like looking over at a different person. A few years ago I couldn't say no but now I can. And my confidence is coming back. I didn't have any confidence a few years ago. It was kicked out of me, knocked out of me through the domestic violence and everything."

(A personal and powerful testimony to a charity which tries to help women embrace personal and powerful change.)

Take a few moments to reflect on the following question.

What is your first reaction when you see or hear stories of drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and homelessness in Britain today?

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

[John 4. 5-42]

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called 'Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, - 'What? You, are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' - Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied: : 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you:' Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons-and his cattle?' Jesus replied: 'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.' 'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.' 'I see you are a prophet, sir' said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said: 'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come - in fact it is here already - when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah - that is, Christ - is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus 'I am he.'

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me all I have ever done,' so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'

Please take a few moments in silence to reflect on the passage

REFLECT and RESPOND

Historically the town or village well was always known as a place of meeting, particularly for women, and as central to the community as water is to life. It was also a place of peace, somewhere cool to rest. It was where Jesus, tired and thirsty after his journey, needed to be the most.

It is reasonable to assume that even in Sychar, her own Samaritan town, she would have been regarded as an outcast - 5 times married and now living with someone else. Using the well at noon, when the sun was at its hottest, suggests that others wouldn't let her use the well at the same time as them. Hers would have been a lonely walk. But then to meet Jesus turns rejection on its head. As a Samaritan she would have been looked down on, treated as unclean, by all Jews - and she was used to seeing herself that way. But not by Jesus. She is clearly shocked that Jesus is speaking to her at all, never mind asking her for a drink. But it is the clear and natural and life-giving gift of water which Jesus uses to express his thirst for her faith, to unlock the deepest desire of her heart, and to unseal a spring in her "welling up to eternal life".

We can wonder about this woman's name. St John never tells us. We only know that the story she tells brings others to Jesus, to their own confession of faith in him as saviour of the world. We may not know her name but we know that she is one of the first evangelists, almost like an apostle. Her story is personal too: "He told me all I have ever done." It is the authenticity of her personal testimony which compels the most.

Pope Francis speaks of "the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there" (Misericordia et Misera para.1). Speaking of another woman in the Gospel, a woman known by everyone to be a sinner, Pope Francis tells us that in meeting Jesus, "what great joy welled up in the heart" (Misericordia et Misera para.3).

God knows us — and loves us —through and through, no matter how far we have wandered through the choices we have made, no matter how deep we might have sunk. No matter what.

A priest was once heard to bless the congregation at the end of Mass with these words: "May almighty God bless you, those you love, and those you are challenged to love". So who are the challenging ones for me?

What should a Christian response be to issues around social exclusion and stigma?

How could I respond to those on the margins of society?

Closing Prayer

Let us pray to the Father and ask him to form a new heart within us:

God of all compassion, Father of all goodness, to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers and sisters. When our weakness causes discouragement, let your compassion fill us with hope and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Acknowledgement:
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Diocese of Westminster