Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4: 5-15 – What is it with water?

In the first scripture reading in Exodus we are told that the Israelites need water. A couple of chapters before this God had already been faithful to His people, sending them manna from heaven for food – or bread from heaven.

Now they have a need for water, so who do they go to? Of course, their leader, Moses. But in truth, and no disrespect to him, but Moses is only the messenger.

In truth I find this passage quite difficult in some ways. I completely understand their need for water. It is a necessity. I admit that I struggle most days to drink enough water, and I know a few people that find it bland, prefer to take it in a cup of tea or coffee. But, if we did not have it, we would definitely want it, in any form offered!

But how did they approach Moses? Quarrelling and grumbling. They even get to the point of saying “Why did YOU bring us out of Egypt?”. Very quick to forget that they were presented with an option. Those who were in the wilderness had taken responsibility themselves to sacrifice the required Passover lamb and daub the blood on their door lintels.

They had not been taken against their will from a comfortable, cosy existence into the wilderness. They had decided to follow God.

But now, their perceived “right” to exist and thrive made them so angry they were almost at the point of stoning Moses – a desire to kill.

But who were they truly angry at? Although they directed their grumbling and words to Moses, they were blaming God for saving them. So when God says to Moses “What am I to do with THESE people”, is He really disowning them? Or is the language being used to highlight that the Israelites had in reality disowned God.

God did not disown His people – He remained faithful once again and provided water from a rock. A happy ending!

But note the words used, Bread of heaven, Living water and a Rock – don’t they all evoke the teaching of Jesus? There is a continuity from the early time of Exodus to the New Testament.

And we hear about Living Water in the scripture from John. But sometimes, let’s be honest, the bible message can be cryptic. Not easy to understand.

We joined Jesus travelling and choosing to go through Samaria. A place that Jews avoided because we know how much they despised the Samaritans. It was complete hatred – to the point where if anyone touched a water jar that a Samaritan had touched they would be ceremonially unclean and have to go through a time of purification, isolation and temple rituals.

Jesus was thirsty, a basic, human need. So he asks a Samaritan woman at the well to draw him water. It is often assumed that because the woman was there at noon that she was an outcast – but some commentaries disagree that was necessarily the case.

But anyway, simply communicating with a Samaritan, even the most pure of all, was still the worst scandal for Jesus as a Jewish man.

With that knowledge it is understandable that the woman asks “Why?”. Jesus responds by saying “If you knew the gift of God” – the beginning of the cryptic message.

Does anyone thrive on cryptic crosswords? Or the Lighthouse quiz? When you chat things through with other people and discover the answer, isn’t it satisfying? Perhaps this is why Jesus speaks in parables and what can seem complicated sayings, so that we have to work through it, on our own and with others, so that the truth is revealed in a deeper way.

If you knew the gift of God – anyone else taken back to Christmas? The gift of God is His grace shown through Jesus, a gift for all time and for all people. Jesus, God’s gift of grace, gave His life freely.

He continues speaking about Living Water. That signifies running and fresh water, flowing and reviving. It is in flowing water that you find life, not in stagnant ponds.

Can you imagine the woman’s confusion? I certainly can. I mean, if you are trying to cook or drink this water from the well is perfectly adequate. Yes, she prefers this spring water, but where is it? She cannot see it, or hear it, so just tell her where it is so she can go and get it.

She continues referring to the well that Jacob built. Speaking of Jacob her ancestor implies a deep reverence to the past, to their ancestor, guided and favoured by God.

Jesus continues in the present day, this opportunity that is right in front of her. Water that wells up, abundant water, abundant life, referring to the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

The passage continues after what was read, and the Samaritan woman begins to argue about places of worship and God’s requirements, that reveal a lack of understanding, as the Samaritans rejected the prophetic scriptures, relying only on the Pentateuch (first five books of our bible).

I am sure that we all know the story, that eventually she came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, as well as others in her village.

As already stated though, the twists, turns and conversations can be complicated. But if we can boil it all down to one, basic point, I think it has to be that our Spiritual health is just as important as our physical health.

The Israelites in the desert kept looking backwards and stopped trusting God. They looked at what was physically absent rather than what was Spiritually present.

The Samaritan woman kept looking at her ancestors rather than seeking what had been promised.

As much as needing water regularly each day, we should seek communion with God just as much, in fact, even more. Keep praying and seeking God’s will for us today, individually and together.