

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Living water

Presented by Margaret Wesley

Water of Life

Do you ever get that feeling of *deja vous* when you listen to the news? Somehow, it seems that you have heard it all before: conflict in the Middle East; brutal dictators in Africa; drug-traffickers on trial in South-East Asia; a government somewhere failing to respond adequately to a natural disaster. Same as yesterday. Same as last year. Same as a decade ago.

In Australia, our Aboriginal peoples still have a desperately lower standard of living than the rest of us; and everything done to address the imbalance seems to make it worse. Why is that? Why is it that some of the most troubling problems in our world just don't seem ever to improve, regardless of how many people of wisdom and experience and good will devote themselves to seeking solutions?

Why is it that some of the most troubling problems in our world – and in our own lives - just don't seem ever to improve, regardless of how hard we work at finding solutions? I have had the opportunity to observe a lot of people as they struggle with depression and anxiety. Especially with young people, the first hint I have of their emotion turmoil is when they start smoking. Or it might be excessive drinking, or inappropriate sexual activity, or overeating, or not eating. They don't need to be told that these behaviours will only make them feel even worse. More depressed. More anxious. They know that. But the pain they are feeling insists on some sort of comfort. And so they reach out for whatever comfort is closest to hand.

And when I am honest, I have to admit that it isn't just other people who make things worse by trying to make them better. I do it too. I have been a Christian all my life. I have worked in a variety of Christian ministries and I now teach in a Bible College. You might think that my instinctive response to stress might have something to do with God. But, the truth is... when my daughter has been winging all afternoon; when I have a difficult phone call from one of my son's teachers; when I have an argument with my husband; when my employers are demanding more from me than I have to give... and particularly when these things are all happening at the same time...

The first question that comes to mind at times like that is not "What would Jesus do in this situation?" It's "How can I get my hands on some chocolate?" And chocolate does make me feel better. Until I swallow. And then I feel worse. Until I have some more. Now why **is** it that? Why do we try to solve our problems by doing things that we know won't help; things that can only make our problems worse?

In the Old Testament, God said these words through one of the prophets:

My people have deserted me,
 even though I am the spring of the water of life.
 And they have dug their own wells.
 But those wells are broken.
 They cannot hold any water. (Jeremiah 2:13)

Can you hear the tragedy in God's tone here? God is the source of life. God **is** life. And God longs to share that life with people. To give us cool, refreshing, healing water. Not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. In those dry and gnarly places in our souls, God longs to pour life-giving water: water that causes good things to grow in places that have only ever known weeds of anxiety and thistles of self-protection.

Living water to satisfy our thirst for acceptance, our thirst for forgiveness, our thirst for justice. Living water to satisfy that most demanding of cravings in all our hearts - our thirst for love. But something holds us back from receiving that water. We cannot satisfy our souls with God's water if we intend to walk away from God. Because God **IS** the living water our souls need, we cannot separate the water from the one who gives it.

I can go into a shop any time and buy a bottle of spring water. I pay some money and I drink the water. I can do that without having any sort of relationship with the person I buy the water from. I don't need to know her name. I don't need to know how his kids are doing at school. I just hand over the money and walk out.

It isn't like that with God. We cannot get hold of the water God gives without dealing personally with God. God doesn't just sell us living water. God *is* the water we need.

But people have chosen to walk out on God. Having a relationship with the creator of universe is seriously daunting and humbling. It demands trust: trust that God really knows what life on this planet is all about; trust that God loves us and wants the very best for us. And, like a relationship between a parent and a child, trust implies obedience. We show that we believe God when we do what God tells us to do. And none of us finds that easy.

So, as we read earlier, people have deserted God and cut themselves off from the water of life. That has left the human race in a constant state of desperate thirst; and so we dig our own wells, we try to find our own water; to solve our own problems; we demand that other people satisfy our needs, keep us safe, make us happy. But they can't do it. And we can't do it for them. The wells we dig are broken. They cannot hold water.

Jesus met a fascinating woman in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. We're not told her name - just her nationality. She was a Samaritan. Samaritans hated Jews. Jesus was a Jew. And Jews hated Samaritans. Like I said, there has always been conflict in the Middle East.

These two people, who were not even supposed to talk to each other, engaged in one of the most important conversations we have recorded in the Bible. They happened to be standing near a well at the time. The woman had come there to get water for her family, but as the conversation proceeds we find that her thirst went far deeper than anything her bucket could hold. She had been married five times and was now living with a man she was not married to. We can only guess how she came to have this sort of history.

Could it be that five deaths had left her a widow five times over? Perhaps men now thought she was bad luck, and so her current man was only willing to have her as a mistress. Not as a wife. Or perhaps five husbands, one after another, had found her unsatisfactory, and had divorced her – thrown her back upon her own resources in a society where it was almost impossible for a woman to survive on her own. And so she had sought the protection of another man; another marriage; only to be rejected again. And again. And now, after five failed marriages, she was prepared to accept a man on any terms.

Imagine the hopes she had felt when she entered those marriages; hopes that were dashed, in one way or another, time after time. Imagine the humiliation she felt when she looked at other women with long, happy marriages and strings of legitimate children. And here she is, a woman who has spent her life looking for a good man... Here she is: face to face with Jesus!

And Jesus looks at her, standing there with her bucket and her aching heart, and he says to her: “Ask me for water. I can give you water that will become a living spring inside your soul, bubbling up to eternal life.”

Finally, this woman has met a man who knows, and can give her, what she really needs. In a delightful ending to this encounter, the woman runs back to the men of her village. But this time she doesn't want anything from **them**. This time **she** has something to give. She has found the messiah, the saviour, the one who would heal their relationship with God, bring them back to the source of life. And she leads them to Jesus.

Can I follow her example and encourage **you** get to know Jesus better: pick up a Bible and read right through one of the first four books of the New Testament. Notice how much it cost Jesus to give us this water; see how completely he entered into our human experience of thirst and need; of pain and death. He did this to bring the water of life right up to our lips.

So, why do our efforts to solve our problems so often make things worse? Because real, lasting, solid solutions are found only in Jesus. Look for solutions elsewhere and you will be digging wells that are cracked and broken – that cannot hold water.

So turn to Jesus. Not just once, but every day. Because every day you will see and read and hear about other ways to satisfy your thirst. Every day, your own mind will whisper to you that perhaps you should dig a few wells of your own – just in case.

But when you are holding a spade to dig a well, you can't cup your hands together to receive the water God gives. So put down your spade – whatever that might represent in your life. Put it down. Empty your hands, receive living water from God, living water that is God.