

The more I read this morning's Gospel story, the more I found myself liking the woman in the story. She comes across as something of a character.

I like the fact that, even though she really hasn't a clue what Jesus is talking about most of the time, she's not too shy or too cowed, to ask him to explain.

How will you get water, if you haven't got a bucket? And, If you give me this living water that you're talking about, that'd be great because I'd never need to go to the well again.

She takes his words completely literally And doesn't seem to even begin to recognise that Jesus might be talking metaphorically

And Jesus seems to know all about her. about her personal life, which seems to be slightly chaotic to say the least and finally tells her that he is the Messiah she knows is coming. Quite a lot for her to take in when you come to think of it, but the exchange has obviously made a deep impression on her. So she rushes back to her village to tell people.

I've just met this amazing man, She says. Come and see, But does she invite people to meet the one who says he's the promised Messiah. No. She just says he's someone who knows everything about her. However, there must have been something about the fervour and excitement of this woman that encouraged them to seek Jesus out for themselves. And when they did, many believed in him for themselves.

What a comforting and inspiring story for us as we seek ways to encourage others to see what we see and believe in the power of Jesus. Because we probably have quite a lot more in common with that Samaritan woman, than we might have realised. Because we don't always understand what Jesus says, do we. Many of his words are, still quite difficult to understand because Jesus often spoke in riddles and in parables, leaving us to work things out for ourselves.

So what does this woman's story remind us?

When we are confused, as we often are. When we are unsure about how Jesus is speaking to us in a very different time, perhaps we should take a lesson from my new feisty friend, and ask.

We can ask in prayer and reflection. We can ask at our Bible and Banter group, where, no question has ever been considered too silly to be asked. We can read - and we can ask a fellow Christian. All these are ways that can help us to hear the voice of Jesus more clearly and to deepen our understanding of what his words might mean to us. And then of course, we can tell others. We do not need to wait until we understand everything, We do not even need to worry whether we've used the best words or the best explanation, because our exact words can be less important than the way we speak them.

If we speak out with fervour and excitement about what we have experienced and what we do believe. If we are not frightened to admit that there are things we do not understand. If we speak honestly about what moves and inspires us, we can let God's Holy Spirit do the rest.

But this story isn't just about the Samaritan woman. It's also about the disciples, And they, I think, have another lesson for us.

Jesus often speaks of being for everyone. He was known to mix with unexpected people - the poor, the sick and the tax collector. But despite knowing all this, the friends who knew him best, were still surprised to see who he was talking to at the well. They made no comment but defaulted to the safety of discussing practical matters such as lunch.

But are we sometimes like that? Do we hang on to the safety of practicalities, to the secular world's values and prejudices to avoid thinking about challenges to our preconceptions?

Jesus doesn't tell the disciples off. He doesn't loftily, tell them they don't need lunch. He tells them that in the end, true fulfilment comes, not from physical things, but from our relationship with God and from fulfilling God's purposes in the world.

And so finally, we come to Jesus himself.

Jesus has described himself as both providing us with living water and as gaining nourishment from doing his Father's will. We too can gain strength from the living water that Jesus gives and from trying to do God's will in a broken world.

Today, we are journeying through Lent alongside Jesus conscious of the darkness that is gathering around him, and also very conscious of dark gathering in our own time.

In a few weeks time, the darkness around Jesus will culminate in the Cross and then the resurrection. We will celebrate the assurance that light can banish the dark and that love can triumph over sin

And so we can rejoice in the upsidedown-ness of a Messiah, a King, who seeks a relationship with each and every one of us, who loves us and knows each of us so very well, and on the Cross demonstrates the depth of that love, Amen.