

Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty

Today we are presented with a story of exhaustion; a story of exhaustion and heat—the searing heat of the powerful sun in the dry and dusty lands of the middle east; a story not just of exhaustion and heat, but of thirst. A story which, so they tell us, happened at about the sixth hour.

And it's a story of two weary people – a weary woman, and a weary man. Which might be a bit surprising, because flip back only a few pages in the Fourth Gospel, and you'll find its author going to great lengths to tell us that the weary man is none other than the Word made flesh. And much of this gospel, to quote a major Biblical scholar, portrays Jesus as 'a God striding over the face of the earth'.

But not today. Not now. This God is shattered. Done in. Hot, thirsty, and exhausted. This God – this God almost feels like he's giving up. And it was about the sixth hour.

Now the woman – perhaps it is no surprise that she is weary. Indeed, she's weary pretty much about everything. For a start, she's clearly weary about having to come out of the town to the well to get her water all the time— that's one of the reasons she asks Jesus to give her living water, "so that I may never...have to keep coming here to draw water." In other words, "Life's a toil, and I can't be bothered working up any enthusiasm for it any more."

And she's weary about men: "You have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband." In other words, "I've made a mess of love, and partnerships, and sex; I can't be bothered taking my fellow human being seriously anymore."

And she's weary about religion: "Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." In other words, "Who can be bothered taking religion seriously, with all these stupid disagreements?"

This is a woman who has had it. She's had it with pretty much every aspect of life. She's broken down and exhausted, and she's pretty much giving up... And just when she least expected it, this weary woman has this most unnerving encounter with a weary man. And it was about the sixth hour.

Of course, she doesn't know it's God that she's encountering. And if someone had warned her that she was going to encounter God on this extraordinary day, as she went to draw water at about the sixth hour, she might have expected God to be all glorious, and strong, and triumphant, not as tired out as she was. And she certainly wouldn't have expected God to be so broken that he has to ask her for a drink. She certainly wouldn't have expected God to turn to her and say, "I am thirsty."

But then again, it was about the sixth hour.

Each year, the Church of God calls us on a Lenten journey – a journey during which, helped by the writer of the Fourth Gospel, we are called to remind ourselves about what God is like. It started three weeks ago, when we were reminded, in the famous story of Jesus being tempted, and we see him insisting that he is going to do things in a God-like way, not a sinful, flawed, human way. He's not going to do the quick fix turning stones to bread, and he's not going to worship the tempter – not even if it gives him all the riches and power the world can muster.

And last week – last week we learned the extraordinary truth that God so loved the world... So loved the world... that he gave his only son. Just imagine how you might have completed that sentence...

And today – today we see God in Christ in a state that is confusing... a state that is confounding... a state that is not the kind of state in which we might ever have imagined that a God-made-flesh could experience. Which is why this broken, weary woman, and her weary friend, are so very important to you, and to me, and to Christians across the world. Because maybe our expectation of how we encounter God needs to be refocussed, just like that woman some 2000 years ago.

Because, I suspect, we think of God being strong – we think of God being all-powerful, being omnipotent, being high and mighty. I suspect that we think that we need God to be the person to whom we turn for sustenance rather than, incredibly, have Him turn to us, especially when we are feeling vulnerable, or weary, or fed up with life, or work, or men, or women, or any of the other things which get us down.

I suspect that moments like that are the times when we want God to come striding along and sort things out for us. I suspect that when we are tired out by our journey, we need God to take charge, rather than to turn to us and say, "Hold on a minute, I'm tired too." But if that is the case, then we, like the woman at the well, we are also in for a shock. Especially when we come to the sixth hour.

Because, at the sixth hour, it is time to discover that God-made-flesh is almost ready to give up – just as he encounters another human being who is also ready to give up. And this is when we start to learn even more clearly what God is really about.

For if we are to understand the victory or the triumph of Easter, you must know it for what it is. Because, for the author of the Fourth Gospel, the power of God's victory lies in the total vulnerability of the cross. And the resurrection which we celebrate on the third day is not the denial of the cross but, rather, it is the

confirmation of it. It is the confirmation that the one we sometimes call Christ the King – it is the confirmation of the fact that this king, extraordinarily, this king reigns from the cross. And that is the reason—the only reason—we dare to call that Friday "Good." Indeed, Eastern Christians regard this as understatement, for the Orthodox that Friday is not merely good, it is Great Friday.

For encountering the King and being a Christian is about acknowledging and building on weariness and pain and suffering and death because it makes us like God. Which is why it was so surprising to the woman we encounter in today's gospel—the woman who meets God, when it was about the sixth hour, only to find him tired out by his journey, only to find him thirsty.

But if you read the Fourth Gospel properly, you begin to see more fully just what was going on at Jacob's Well. You begin to realize that the woman saw more than she realised, when she had that surprising encounter:

"Pilate brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

It is at the Sixth Hour that Jesus' destiny is finally confirmed and put in place. It is at the Sixth Hour that Jesus is sent on his way to be thirsty one final time:

"When Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It was as that weary and broken woman was about to give up that she encountered Christ the King, and, in doing so, she found a God the like of which she had never imagined, a God so human, so vulnerable, so caught up in the world, that she realized that, incredibly, he had something to offer her. Despite her cynicism, her tiredness, her stream of lovers, and all the rest of it, this God, who knew what it was to be tired and to thirst, and who would know even more agonizingly just how tired and thirsty the journey would ultimately make him, this God was prepared to offer her living water - right there, where she was. And so she said—and she says on behalf of me and of you—"Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty."

"Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So, they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and

of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out."

Dear people of St Peter's, as you journey on your Lenten pilgrimage, when you are feeling weary or broken, I pray that you may meet God at the sixth hour, that He may give you the taste of his living water, and that you may never be thirsty again. Amen.