

## Re-digging the wells Visitation charge 2023

**John 7. 37-39** <sup>37</sup> *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."*<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>39</sup> *By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

### A huge Thank you to all wardens – long serving, & new in our partnership in the Gospel

Recently I was in the Lake District one of my favourite places; majestic beauty forged from ancient geological activity, and collision of tectonic plates hundreds of millions of years ago, now offering an outdoor paradise. My last walk was from the Grasmere side of Helvellyn on the Patterdale path; an ancient bridal way up through the fells. As a contemporary walker I was thankful that the ancient patch is regularly maintained and rebuilt with park rangers adding new heavy stones to maintain the route, manage erosion and make following the ancient ways, reaching the mountains accessible. I reached Grisedale tarn, a small lake around 1800 ft above sea level. The paths then head off in a number of directions; requiring a decision on which ancient path to follow next with the aid of paper and digital O.S maps!

Everyone reaches crossroads of evaluation at some point.

We have a shared call to make the Good News of Jesus known afresh in this generation with our modern contemporary roles and challenges, to be in the business of inviting people to follow Jesus and grow deep roots of a fruitful life with Him.

In life and in our shared ministries / vocations I am reminded and impacted by the thought that at each 'crossroad' of evaluation, consultation and making important decisions, we do so in the presence of the 'ancient of days', a faithful God who through the life of His Son Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit always offers the wisdom and guidance of the ancient paths, the way which is ever old and ever new and always relevant even in our modern world, because it is God's world and God's purposes we seek to serve.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus promises to all who, at a cross road of decision, put their belief and trust in him, literally putting our lives in his hands, a life giving stream will flow from within, with Jesus himself as the source of water to the spiritual wells that will refresh renew and replenish our lives.

Now talk of constant running water always rings alarm bells with wardens – A leaking roof, blocked gutter, damaged leaky water pipes or rising damp!

It's the concluding day of a week-long festival of booths / tabernacles; a remembering of a time when Israel's community life was lived in tents and without a temple; remembering God's faithfulness and provision. Great I hear you say – no faculties or DAC to concern them!

At the heart of the festival though is a re-enactment of Ezekiel's vision of God's glory returning to the temple, following Exile. The procession through Jerusalem's streets cries and trumpets and singing– *with joy shall you draw water from the wells of Salvation (Isaiah 12.3).*

Re-enactment of vision of Ezekiel 47 – water from the temple – trickle to a mighty river, ankle deep – too deep to walk across, trees on the banks whose leaves are for the healing of the nations

- God's glory – sovereignty – holiness, our worship and mission, renewal and healing
- God's glory in our lives and in his church – our vocation, call, worship and mission

Today as a church, we stand at a new cross roads of challenge and opportunity.

Our church – buildings – have a wonderful role to play in being or becoming ‘wells’ – places that enable others to explore, discover, find a welcome and a hospitality that draws them close to receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ. When you are tired and fed-up with building stuff – and if you haven’t you will!

May I encourage you to draw more water from the well that Jesus or Lord offers?

This might be the ‘wells of resourcing’ that the diocese offers as part of our shared life – Clare Strachan, Matt Jermyn, your clergy, area deans, archdeacons, and other diocesan support staff – here to help, here to serve you. Clare’s work on building strategy will gather pace over the coming months, do watch out for this as she seeks to work with you. How to we best protect and develop our church buildings for continued worship and mission, creative uses, and sometimes closure or resting a while.

**(Articles of enquiry)** – Please review with your incumbents and PCCs, we undertake to analyse the finds as the listening process attests. It helps us to continue to find best ways of serving you in your roles and mission.

Of greater importance though, is our own spiritual thirst quenching and replenishment – activist ministry makes it especially important to seek Jesus for that living water to flow. Are you being refreshed and renewed?

These two aspects are both important if we are to be fruitful in facing both the challenge and opportunities that are presenting to us today. Sometimes the wells get blocked – the Spirit can be the ‘spiritual’ Silit Bang’ that we all benefit from.

Presently, the Lord is speaking to me about one aspect of the mission of the church as re-digging the ancient wells of our faith and our call in Christ. How do we as church create the opportunities and the spaces to flourish? Where are the blockages? Where do we need to allow water of God’s life to flow?

God’s prophet Jeremiah seeks to call people back to God with a vision of hope and renewal, reminding them of the ancient wisdom, the faithful God of the Covenant whose ancient promise speaks into his time and place. **Jeremiah 6:16**

*<sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Seeking the ancient paths might be a helpful invitation and challenge. Mixed ecology of church as we seek to grow is so important. It honours and draws from the life giving heritage and yet at the same time seeks new ways.

Re-digging the ancient wells will enable us to find new sources of inspiration, possibilities, locations, people, and places as we grow our Diocesan church family vision to serve the church and grow the heart of England.

***God provides wells of his grace to sustain us and save us***

Gen 16. 13-14- Hagar banished by Sara set to die with her slave child of Abraham (Ismael) – finds a spring / well – ‘The well of the One who lives and sees me’

***Connection with blessings and provision of former generations***

In Gen 26: Isaac, following a famine is looking for water to sustain his family, community, and livestock

He re-digs the former ancient wells that his Father Abraham had dug (26.15) his envious rivals / enemy (Philistines) fills them all in again – cutting of source of life and blessing

They dig some fresh wells but disputes arise – Esek (dispute), Sitnah (opposition)

Finally, they move on and dig yet another well – ***Rehoboth = Room - Now the Lord has given us space and we will flourish***

***Promise renewed – God is faithful and he uses prophetic markers to remind us***

Gen 46. 1-4 – Fast forward Isaac's son Jacob (Israel) sets off for Egypt, but God wants to remind him of his heritage and inheritance, future blessings and promise of his presence in a strange land, a promise of future return. He chooses Beersheba (where Isaac had dug an earlier well) to meet / speak to Jacob – God speaks: Here I am – Don't be afraid, promise of future blessing (God's faithfulness) and return you to the place of space and flourishing.

Possibly the same well (or Shechem) where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman (John 4) in the heat of the day and offers her living water. – Whoever drinks the water I give shall never thirst...

***Wells of Salvation – re-digging the wells is ultimately a Spirit led adventure that will glorify God and lead people to the source of living water, Jesus Christ***

***This is a shared venture, a partnership in mission in which church wardens have a vital role to play***

A mixed ecology church that we are seeking to water and grow, honours and values her ancient inheritance and yet interprets and is fed by this heritage to seek the new thing the Lord is doing, fed, renewed and replenished by the One who is the Living Well.

So thank you again, and may you find encouragement in the Lord as you seek to re-dig these spiritual wells through your places of worship and in your lives

May we all know a rediscovery and deepening of our worship and prayer, a renewal of our spiritual life (discipleship), as apprentice learners as we invite the living waters of the life of God to refresh, renew and replenish us in the days ahead.

***The Venerable Barry Dugmore***

***Archdeacon Missioner (Archdeacon of Warwick)***

***June 2023***