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|--|-------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020</b> |       | <b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent</b> |  |
| <b>Grahamstown Cathedral</b>             |       | <b>Year A</b>                        |  |
| <b>8.30 a.m.</b>                         |       | <b>VESTRY SUNDAY</b>                 |  |
| Exodus 17:1-7                            | Psalm | Romans 5:1-11                        |  |
|  |       | John 4:7-26                          |  |
| <b>LIVING WATER</b>                      |       |                                      |  |

“Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14-15).

## **ANNUAL VESTRY MEETING**

Many thanks to our faithful photographers, to Maggy Clarke for putting the slide show together, and to Lungile Penxa for doing the screening in the context of our worship today. Our Annual Vestry Meeting later this morning is a necessary and important part of the life and ongoing work of the Cathedral. Having said that, Vestries and meetings of this nature are not always the flavour of the month! I encourage all Cathedral members to attend Vestry and to take part, as far as possible.

Who would have guessed, this time last week, that we would be facing a crisis of this magnitude, with the coronavirus? We acknowledge and hold in prayer all who are infected or impacted in any way; those in quarantine in Polokwane, health care officials, and others as they respond. Events are being cancelled – graduations at UCT, Stellenbosch and Rhodes; sporting and cultural events; plans and travels are affected. Let’s respond with faith and hope and love.

When I was about eight years old, our family moved from Pietermaritzburg to Stellenbosch. My parents bought a small piece of ground which was to become our home for the next 25 years. I remember it with fondness: a house, sheep buildings, pastures, trees, grass. But when we arrived there, the only thing on the property was a borehole. A well. That well kept us and our animals going for all the years that we lived there. Even in times of drought, it never ran dry. It saved our lives.

Today our scripture readings gather us around a series of wells. Boreholes. Sources of water. The water of life.

In our Old Testament reading, the people of Israel were in the wilderness. They had escaped from slavery in Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea. They had seen the Egyptians dead on the sea shore. They had been saved and set free. Now they were on the journey to the Promised Land. God had provided them with manna and quails – bread and meat. And now they were thirsty. Desperate for water. And again, God provided for them. Water came from the rock. The well in the desert.

The Samaritan woman came to the well at the middle of the day, when no one else was there. She was ashamed, she was something of an outcast because of who she was, her lifestyle with her five husbands... she had a story to tell, she was familiar with heartache and betrayal, she had been let down, left, deserted probably – we don't know her full story. She too was in the wilderness. But she came to the well, and found living water, Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus who saves us by his death: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Jesus speaks of the living water (Jn 4:10), water that gives eternal life. “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14-15).

What is your wilderness? What dry deserts, dry places are you in? What are the rocky, hard places you walk through?

It could be the wilderness of grief, of loss, sorrow, sadness. It could be the wilderness of failure, despair. It could be the wilderness, the desert, of loneliness, isolation. It could be the wilderness of poverty, struggle. We are in the wilderness as a country, with the economy in decline, rising unemployment, campus conflict, desperate people, and now the coronavirus.

But we have to keep going. We cannot stop the world... We have to find hope and direction in the wilderness. We have to find living water, find what keeps us alive. For the sake of our children, our families, one another, we have to keep going. And so we come to draw water, to find living water. The water of life.

On this Vestry Sunday, we take stock. We look around, at the wilderness of our lives, our community. And we ask, “Where to from here?” On a personal note, Claire and I have been here for over 12 years. I had never expected to be here as Dean for as long as this. I have just over three years before I retire. So Vestry is a good time to ask ourselves questions

about the life and witness of the Cathedral, and to affirm what we are doing. The basics. Our life of prayer. Raising up leadership and ministry. Worship that reflects our Eastern Cape and also international identity, the best of the old and the best of the new, using traditional and contemporary music, different languages. Being a place that draws in people from all over. A good place to be. The prophetic role and voices of our artists, musicians and poets. Being open to the counter-narrative of the gospel, that challenges and questions our easy assumptions and status quo.

But it is not just about us and the Cathedral. It is about finding life for the way forward. For the struggles we face as a community, as a country. The environment, climate change, use of power, good governance, poverty, and much more besides.

So we come once again to the well of living water, like the Israelites, like the Samaritan woman. Thirsty. No food, no water, nowhere to go. Lost and drifting. Yet again and again, God provided for them. Water from the rock. Manna and quails. Bread and meat. The cloud by day and the fire by night. The place where there is nothing we can do except look to God to provide. As God indeed will do.

## **CONCLUSION**

May God bless us in our life and journey together.

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Dean of Grahamstown  
March 2020