

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

Growing up in Britain one cannot help but develop a fondness for the damp and the wet. Compared to this country and many other parts of the world Britain does not really have extreme weather. Severe winter storms and scorchingly high temperatures are equally unheard of in Britain. Instead we have precipitation. Mostly light and uneventful, but ubiquitous and regular, it certainly rains a lot in Britain. Some of my fondest childhood memories involve being soaked in a downpour, just as other less inviting memories are set against a backdrop of long afternoons of incessant rain.

The same cannot be said of the land of the scriptures, that geographical area that we often transcribe as holy. There it is hot and water is not omnipresent. Instead water is a scarce commodity. And so in the scriptures water is precious in a way that no one who has grown up wearing wellington boots will ever understand.

The fact that such an ordinary substance can mean something so different depending on one's geographical location is a timely reminder of the way in which we all bring different values to even the most mundane realities. The Bedouin tribes will hear a story about water as a story about not just the components of life, but about life itself. While the residents of Holland and other low-lying countries should be forgiven for seeing water differently, including as a threat to life.

When Jesus and Moses interact with water in the scriptures we heard earlier, each time they do so profoundly aware of the cultural resonances that water has in their society. But each time those cultural resonances are used to affirm the life-giving reality that is God. When I read these texts through the lens of my own cultural conditioning, what speaks to me as much as the power of water

itself, is the manner in which Jesus and Moses engage with the reality of their world.

By talking about water Jesus and Moses remind their followers that God takes the material world seriously. Unlike some spiritual teachers who view the material entirely in opposition to the spiritual, the story of water reminds us that matter can be a route into the spiritual. If we take that seriously it strikes me that we have to entirely recalibrate our understanding of who God is and what God wants of us.

Many Christians have divided the world into two opposing realities, the material world and the spiritual world. By contrast, both Moses and Jesus show us that we fully participate in the spiritual only when we have also attended to the physical. Such a model of wholeness integrates our spiritual needs with our physical needs.

So what does this all mean for us? Chances are few of us are like the Israelites or Samaritan woman in the desert seeking water. But while water is not a scarce resource for us, Lent is the time when all of us are asked to review what it is that is scarce in our life. If prayer or meditation or reading are things you never have time for, then those are life-giving practices that you should devote some time too. Equally, if you have no time for family, friends or relationships because of work or other commitments then you will want to devote more time to relationships. Equally for others of you, time alone apart from others may be the kind of life-giving time that you need. Today I urge each of you to look into your heart and reflect on where the scarcity is – where something life-giving is absent that you know would make your life fuller.

Most of us spend most of the time spend our time ignoring or avoiding facing the truth of what really gives us life. We imagine that activities of one sort or another define us. I suspect though that many of us know that what is truly life-giving is human

intimacy and communion with others. But so much of the time we act as if possessions are what is life-giving.

During Lent God does not ask us to become heavyweight prayer book users or super hero bible readers. I don't think God even particularly cares about how fluent we are in knowing the scriptures. But I do think that God cares about whether we can take the time to learn about what is life-giving.

If we take the time to focus on what gives us life, I think we will discover that our own worst enemy is often our own self. The Lenten tradition of giving things up is one way in which we are forced to confront habits that may not always be life-giving. Equally, there is a powerful case to be made for taking things up during Lent. Not necessarily big things. But little changes to our daily routines that will allow us to tune in to the fullness of life that God wants for us.

Spiritual vitality does not always come with physical vitality, just as physical prowess is no guarantee of spiritual wholeness. But during Lent all of us are asked to focus on how two are interrelated. We are not pure spirit, and our bodies are important devices of communication. Without our bodies, however frail and however failing, we would not enjoy communion with others. In the same way, without a sense of what it means to enjoy a spiritual life we risk a form of divine malnutrition. Humans are fed not just by physical food, but also the spiritual food that comes from God. And where we close ourselves off to God, our well dries up leaving us empty and life-less.

God reminds us that it is in our weakness, our spiritual unfitness and our failures that God sees each of us as a person of eternal worth. As Paul reminds us in the letter to the Romans, "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." If

that is true, then where we sin, and where God's love is absent or scarce, that is where we have to look for God.

Change is one of the hardest things for humans. And yet the story of God's relationship with humanity is one of profound and continual change. Just as Moses went on ahead of the Israelites in search of water, so God is always ahead of us calling us into new life-giving territory. God is forever calling us forward, in continuity with our past, but not in subservience or fear of past mistakes.

Not all change is good of course. But in the scriptures God is not found in a static place, but in an Exodus Journey, a pilgrimage, a traveler, a nomad, a woman going for water or a worker harvesting a field. In the New Testament we rarely find Jesus in a temple or building. Instead we almost always find Jesus standing alongside those who are on the margins, listening to the excluded, and serving those others considered imperfect and unclean.

If we are to refresh and renew our own spiritual lives, we need to do the same. We need to open ourselves up to that which we have found uncomfortable or challenging. And we can trust that if we do God will transform our imperfect loving into that perfect loving that is the source of all life. Amen.