

## **Sermon: Leith Valley Church**

19 April 2009

Martin Ray

Readings from New King James Version

Isa 55. 1-2

John 4. 1-26

Rev 22. 1

1. When I was about 10, I went ice skating with my cousin in the city of Nottingham in England...you know where Robin Hood came from, at least he lived in Sherwood Forest outside Nottingham, it was the bad sheriff who lived in Nottingham...anyway it was a long bus journey and on the way back I asked my cousin "What do you really want out of life?" and he replied "I just want to be happy" which I guess is a fairly common reply from a young person, then he said "well what do you want?" so I thought and replied "I want to be satisfied." I was thinking I wanted to come to the end of my life and look back and think what glorious, adventurous and noble things I had done, I really wanted to be self-satisfied.

Not for me were the words of Mick Jagger who said:

"I can't get no satisfaction, I can't get no satisfaction.

'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try.

I can't get no, I can't get no.....

Hey hey hey, that's what I say. I can't get no, I can't get no,

I can't get no satisfaction, no satisfaction, no satisfaction, no satisfaction."

No, I listened to the romantic works of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov and read books of explorers in Africa and had hopes and dreams.

2. But soon I found everything wasn't quite going according to plan....

As a young man I travelled up the Nile in the footsteps of the explorers, but when I got to Khartoum I got stuck. There was insecurity in the South and I could go no further.

The nine languages I was going to learn and speak fluently as I travelled the world...well I speak French rather badly and a few words of Arabic.

I found I wasn't as clever as I hoped and I was scared and self conscious

My University days which are supposed to be the happiest days of your life, were for me the loneliest, I didn't know how to relate to people

When I got a job it was in Central London and I had to commute on the 7:59 from Epsom, calling at Ewell West, Stoneleigh, Worcester Park, Motspur Park, Raynes Park, Wimbledon, Earlsfield, Clapham Junction, Vauxhall and Waterloo. I worked in my office and stared out of the window at the building across the other side of the street. Then I caught the 17:56 back from Waterloo to Vauxhall, Clapham Junction, Earlsfield, Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Motspur Park, Worcester Park, Stoneleigh, Ewell West and Epsom....forever those stations will be etched on my memory.

I had a great thirst that there must be more to life, and I also had an ongoing battle with myself and sinful habits. I had had a good upbringing that had made me aware of my sinfulness, but had no answer as to what to do about it, I was powerless.

3. Management consultants sometimes classify the needs of man under 3 Ss.....

Security, Sympathy and Significance...

which is quite a good summary I think, and before we meet God we fill our lives with music, business, sport, anything to try and make them count, to give them significance. When we were last in Sudan we met an ambassador who had a wife who did the weirdest and wackiest things, but her husband was so proud of her and said "she's so busy, so busy". It didn't seem to matter what she did, the fact that she was so busy made it all count, all worthwhile. I will often try and cram in one more email in the evening to make the day count which drives my wife to distraction. We think if we can just manage to do enough we'll satisfy this great thirst – or will we?

But then we ask what's the point anyway? I recently heard a young lady from a fast developing country being interviewed on the radio and she was being asked about the changes in her country and what were the most important things in her life. She replied, "the most important thing in my life"...(and here she gave a nervous, slightly embarrassed little giggle)... "is myself!" I suspect in her society in the past the needs of the individual had been dominated by the family and the community. She was now becoming free of that, but only to come under the domination of herself instead.

And then like us you may have visited poorer countries. In Khartoum at the traffic lights, deformed children who cannot walk for various reasons, some have suffered from polio I think, crawl around between the cars holding their hands up for money. And while we strive to add significance and fulfillment to our lives, you wonder what significance and fulfillment mean to them.

The world has no answers to our needs except to tell us to keep on running, like a hamster in a wheel in the hope that the faster we go the better things will be, but there is no time to stop.

A middle aged lady has recently caused a sensation with her beautiful voice in a TV programme in the UK called "Britain's got talent." Even Simon Cowell was really impressed with her. The song from Les Miserables starts with these words.....

"I dreamed a dream in time gone by  
When hope was high and life worth living....."

but it ends like this.....

"I had a dream my life would be  
So different from this hell I'm living,  
So different now from what it seemed...  
Now life has killed the dream I dreamed"

.

Have your dreams been broken? Are you thirsty for more? I hope I'm not depressing you too much, but there is hope, which brings us the young woman in our story this morning (John chapter 4).

6. She had a great thirst and was trying to satisfy it with human affection. She had had 5 men (the Bible word used here means men and doesn't necessarily mean husbands) and the man she was now living with was not her husband. She was right that relationships are the key, but she was missing the one central one that is the key to all the others. Do you remember the old records you used to put on a turntable? You might try and line up the edge at different points, but there was really only one way of getting it on – put the hole over the knob in the middle – then all the edges came right of their own accord.

Jesus spoke to her and said “Give me a drink”. She was surprised. She thought he would be racially prejudiced and ignore her, but He has no partiality between people of different nations and between men and women.

But there were more surprises to come. He said

v10 “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, give me a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.”

He was saying to her, there is something you can do for me, but there's something much greater I can do for you, I can give you Living Water. Now she lived in the Middle East and knew that water means life. (And when satellites are sent to distant planets these days one of the first things they look for is water to see if there is any possibility of life). But she could not understand what He meant by living water. The only water she could think of was what was in the well, so she said:

"Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep" ....

In terms of physical water she was the clear winner. She had the well and the water and he didn't even have anything to draw water with. But in terms of the living water that Jesus was talking about, she was nowhere. She had nothing to draw with and the well of her life was empty and dry. Most wells in Khartoum are old dry ones that are now too shallow. The children drop stones down them and the stones rattle down bouncing off the sides until you hear not the splash of it landing in the water, but the dull thud as it hits the dry bottom of the well.

So Jesus makes the distinction clearer (v 13).

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst.”

Jesus who made man says there is a drink that He gives that totally satisfies, that meets our deepest longings and strongest desires.

10. But what *is* the drink that Jesus gives? There are some things He speaks in parables but some things He makes very clear

Jn 7.37- 38 ‘On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit whom those believing in Him would receive.’

The drink that Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit, in your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. The drink is nothing less than the life of God in you.

But you might say “How can I be sure He will meet all my need and my deepest thirst? Because He made us and knows our depths and the deepest parts of a man or woman call out for God.

12. In the south of France there is a place called the Fontaine de Vaucluse where a river pours out of the mouth of a cave. Sometimes the flow isn’t too strong, but sometimes it pours out strongly, it is literally a river pouring out of the mountain side. Shortly after he had developed scuba diving equipment, Jacques Cousteau and another diver went down about 60m underwater in this cave to try and discover the source of the river. They nearly died in the attempt because of faulty equipment. (Many years later they sent down a robot and found an underground passage feeding in at 300m depth). But nobody knows the depths of a man or woman except God.
13. But, you might say, does He understand the deep longing I have to be married? Yes, and He won’t take the place of human affection, but He wants you to be so satisfied with His love so that you are not dominated by the desire to be married. When I was young my friends and I sometimes used to hear preachers say something like “I love God more than I love my wife!” and we used to scoff at this and say how could anyone love God more than a wife? But now I understand it is true, He knows what is in my depths and “underneath are the everlasting arms.” My mother who was here a few weeks ago was married to my father for 55 years, but then he died, and she had no words of anger or bitterness even though she misses him so much. She just said she was so thankful for the time they had had together, because she knows she is in the everlasting arms of the Father.
14. In Luke 12 .50, Jesus, referring to his death said an interesting thing. He said “I have a baptism to be baptized with and how I am straitened till it be accomplished” Straitened means restricted on both sides or under pressure, like being in a straight jacket. Why did Jesus say that? Because He was longing to give this living water, this life giving Holy Spirit not only to those He was with at the time, but to all of us, so that we might be born again of the Spirit. And we are still living in those days when men and women can be saved and born again.

He was straitened because he wanted to see the power of sin broken in our lives and for us to be free. We used to sing a Christmas song to our children that included these words  
“He a child in weakness came into this earth,  
Vanquished Satan, broke our chains, gave our spirits birth...”  
When we got to that point one of our boys would get very excited and say

Daddy, daddy, how did he break the chains, did he do it like this? (as he motioned a strong karate chop!). So I said, yes I guess He did it like that and to this day I haven't thought of a better way to illustrate it.

According to the laws of heredity, if our father is a drunkard and our uncles are gamblers, or our mother is a constant worrier, or there is divorce or immorality in the family, we don't stand much of a chance in life. Picture those things like horizontal chains all feeding their influences into our lives. We are almost bound to develop some if not all of these tendencies and problems. But Jesus has cut right down through our old heredity and broken these chains and can give us a new life, His life, the life of the Holy Spirit, and a new heredity, the heredity of the children of God. So we develop the characteristics of His life instead.

And this Life gives us all the security and sympathy and significance we long for, and sets us free from striving to make a name for ourselves because we find all we need in Him.

This last time we were in Sudan we had dealings with two of the most awkward people I have ever known, and you'll be shocked to hear that one of them was an Englishman. Driven by ambition they made life for so many others difficult and sometimes a misery. How is it that some people are so awkward, so difficult? They just haven't drunk of that living water, the sweet Holy Spirit that Jesus gives. The only truly free people in this world are those who have drunk deeply. If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.

And we find that our situation matters little any more, whether it's commuting to London or being chained to the kitchen sink. We can do it all for Him. In the words of Madame Guyon from a French prison "All scenes alike engaging prove to souls impressed with sacred love"

And free from concern about ourselves, we can focus on Him and ask 'what can I do for you Lord'? Three of David's men who had lived with him and saw the Spirit of God in the man (who did not take revenge on his enemy Saul), these 3 just overheard him say one day "oh, that someone would give me a drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" (2 Sam 23.15) and they risked their lives to bring it to him. This was of course prophetic of the living water that would one day flow from Bethlehem.

So have you drunk the living water that Jesus gives? Have you received His Holy Spirit?

I'm so glad God brought me to a point in my life where I knew I had a choice – to continue in my independence and sin, and enjoy the pleasures of them (but I also knew that sin would increase and my life would steadily become a living hell).....or to turn to Him and ask Him for His cleansing Holy Spirit. And I knew God cannot be fooled, it is all or nothing with Him.

14. But let's just come back to our story, because there is more, even the best saved till last. The living water that Jesus gives is not a stagnant pool but (v14) "The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" It will be constantly fresh, bubbling up, flowing out.

And it will be in you. We are not like little birds on the nest with our beaks constantly wide open waiting to be fed from above. Rupert's had an old economics teacher at school. They used to ask him lots of questions so he would sometimes say "Boys, boys! Do you want me to spoon feed you with some giant wooden spoon?" And he gestured how he would do it and laughed loudly at his own joke, and the boys laughed too, though more at him than his joke.

God puts the Holy Spirit *in* us, so we can drink living water any time.

We were coming down off the Routeburn Track one time and were hot and tired and the river was beautifully clear and fresh looking and our eldest, Sam, said "there's something I've always wanted to do, swim in (under) the water and drink it at the same time." So he did just that. The Holy Spirit is around us but He's also in us.

15. So you might ask...How can I start drinking this living water? You don't have to find a river and try and be a fish!

Jesus said

(Jn 7.37) "If any one thirsts, let him come to me and drink" and  
(Rev 22.17) whoever desires let him take of the water of life freely

As Richard asked the children last week, do you trust Him that He has good water for you to drink?

How do you come to Him? It doesn't really matter, just the best way you know how. God honours a seeking heart, you can rely 100% on His promises such as this one:

Lk 11.11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you will you give him a stone?  
.....how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

If you have never consciously received God's Holy Spirit, let me encourage you to ask God now. Ask Him quietly as we pray, or pray out loud if you like or when you get home. His Spirit in you will make you a new person.

Or if your well has become blocked up and dry, come to Him and ask for the living water to spring up again.

We're all with you and in this together. Every step one of us takes towards God builds up and encourages us all.