

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

17 – 24 May, 2015

Jesus said to her: "Give me to drink".

(John 4:7)



Photo: Russell Falls, Tasmania by Jen Tutin

Sermon Notes

These sermon notes are based on the biblical texts from John's Gospel presented in the ecumenical worship service. The following dot points are presented in the hope that the preacher may find something to spark the imagination. Only the local preacher will know the local situation well enough to take these universal ideas and allow them to be interrogated by the experience of the congregation and then in turn to allow the texts to interrogate the local congregation.

- The liturgy for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been prepared by the churches of one of the largest nations on earth. Brazil is the fifth largest nation by both area and population. More significantly, Brazil is the second most forested countries in the world and has more renewable water than any other country, double the amount of the next nearest country. Water is life in Brazil and along the great rivers cities and villages are enabled to exist. Water everywhere enables individual life and community, and until comparatively recently the great rivers of Brazil enabled communication and trade between communities. It is appropriate then that the Brazilian churches have chosen living water as the defining theme of this year's week of prayer.
- Water is the source of all physical life and is appropriately chosen as a basic symbol of spiritual life. All in the *oikumene*, the 'whole inhabited world', share this basic need. As we read the Gospel narrative of the interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well we gain a number of insights into the life-giving relationship between God and the world that is mediated in Jesus.
- As the great rivers of Brazil are pathways between communities in towns and cities, enabling trade and exchange of culture and knowledge, so Jesus spoke to the woman at the well about a promised pathway to eternal life in terms of living water. Jesus is the source of the life giving water and is the pathway to God for those who seek. During the week of prayer for Christian unity we affirm that we do not travel the way of Jesus alone but in company, in company with the baptized in every tradition.
- People must consume a reasonable amount of water daily, and we thirst for that which is life to us. As our bodies thirst for the water that enables physical life, so we thirst for that which gives wholeness, completeness of life. We are made to be in fellowship and our own being requires completeness through oneness with others. Without fellowship with God we are always incomplete and there will always be times when we are aware of our lack of something critical.

During this week of prayer for Christian unity we affirm that we should always feel incomplete if we do not recognize and celebrate our oneness with those who are in Christ but in a tradition other than our own.

- In the Gospel, well and water combine to provide fellowship and hospitality. The village well was the centre of community life, where information was exchanged and friendships built. Jesus met the woman at the well, where water provided the context for fellowship. Jesus was a stranger in the Samaritan village and was dependent upon the goodwill and hospitality of people who were traditionally at enmity with his own people. His request for hospitality was a request to be admitted to life-giving fellowship. There are a number of stories in the Old Testament of people coming to a strange villages and wells seeking life giving hospitality and water. Many centuries before Jesus came to the Samaritan village well, Abraham's servant came to a village well seeking welcome and was admitted to the safety of his mistresses' family. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminds us that members of other Christian faith traditions should always feel welcome in our congregation.
- In the Gospel encounter between Jesus and the woman, Jesus speaks of living water "gushing up to eternal life". When one enters into fellowship with God through Jesus, life grows and flows. This encounter at the well speaks of baptism and baptism is the point of entry into divine fellowship and life through water.
- As people who have entered into life through the water of baptism, we are enabled to better bear the image of God. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the divine 'community of being'; we are called to live lives that are reflective of this Trinitarian God. The fellowship we enjoy with all who have been baptized is both symbolised and realised in the Lord's supper (2 Corinthians). This is especially important during this week of prayer where we affirm and celebrate our oneness in Christ.
- The Lord's Supper is at the same time the Godly gift that speaks of and enables the fellowship that is the Church, as well as the expression of the koinonia that invites us into the very life of God. Our fellowship is with God the Father, in the Son and through the Spirit (1 John).

