

## Care, Courage, Hope, Trust

Jeremiah 29:10-14, Psalm 33, Romans 15:1-13, John 4:7-15, 39-42

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18.20) Today we are here together, beside one another and with one another, gathered in Jesus' name.

In our Gospel reading about what Jesus was able to do for the Samaritan woman, and through her for her community, we see an example of mutual care. It begins with Jesus receiving from her and ends with her receiving from Jesus, and then her community receiving first from her and then from him.

It is quite awkward to speak of her at any length without naming her, so I am going to call her Photini, a name given to her in the Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions. It means the luminous one or the enlightened one, a recognition of her receiving and sharing the light of Christ.

So, Jesus meets Photini at the well and asks her for water. Can you think of another story from the Old Testament in which someone comes to a well in a place he would not normally be, and he meets a woman at the well and asks her for water? [... Finding Rebekah, the bride for Isaac.]

Abraham's servant would find out whether he had found the right woman for Isaac if he asked her for a drink. When he asked, Rebekah agreed to give him and his men water and she also offered to water his camels. This was a very generous offer. If you want to know how much water she needed to draw (for the servant, the men with him, and the camels), ask me later.

Abraham's servant knew that the right woman would be courteous, kind, hospitable, and interested in others, including their well-being. He would know all this by her response to his request for water. Did Rebekah go with him to marry Isaac? [ ... ]

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus asks Photini, this woman in Samaria, for water. We assume that she gave Jesus water, because they continued in conversation. It is the longest conversation between Jesus and another person in any of the gospels. Photini, like Rebekah, is courteous, kind, hospitable and interested. She is willing to help him even before knowing who he is or what he may have to offer. She is the right person to hear what Jesus will tell her. Can you think of another example of God choosing the right person for something, even if they did not seem like the right person to themselves or others [...]

Jesus receives from Photini the gift of water in a dry and thirsty place, and in return he offers her living water, gushing up to eternal life.

The end of this encounter was, we hear, that “many came to believe in Jesus, because of the Samaritan woman’s testimony and because of his word.” Simple beginnings can bring great things. We live in a world thirsty for the love of God.

The mutuality of care, exchange of ideas, and shared spiritual insights that characterised this conversation can bind us together too. Some of us are already friends, some are strangers, and some are something in between, but we know that we are all followers of Jesus.

As well as many newer people, there are a few people here from both parishes who worshipped together in North Belconnen in the 1970s and 1980s, in the early days of establishing our parishes. Who was here in those early days when the Reverend Brian Carter was the parish priest? [Hands up ... ] We, all of us, as God’s people gathered today, are not the same people we were then. Some of us were elsewhere or perhaps not even born, and this is not the same place in which we worshipped, but the life of the church (That’s us!) goes on. I wonder in how many places you might have worshipped God in your lifetime. Fewer than 10? Too many to count?

I am very moved by the word of the Lord from the lips of Jeremiah. “I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you...” Our circumstances are different from those to whom Jeremiah spoke. We have not been in exile, far from it, we have worshipped our God in these 2 parishes, and we continue to praise and proclaim God in this part of Belconnen. Over the years we have been joined by many and we have served many, and now God has brought us together again. We have been brought back, not to the same place, but to one another. Not as we were, but in a new way for a new future, including our relationship with St James Parish in Holt.

God has plans for us and a future. We don’t know all the details, but we trust in the guide. We walk a common path as followers of Jesus, although we may experience that walk differently. Nevertheless, we walk this path together and can care for one another on the journey.

We care for our neighbour in many different ways, whether they be brother or sister, friend or foe, known to us or unknown. You don’t always have to be an action hero to care for someone. It may be as simple and positive as a smile or a word of encouragement. Care is a mutual thing. Just knowing that someone else cares about us makes a world of difference, even before they say or do anything to act on that care.

On page 461 of the Episcopal Church’s Online Book of Common Prayer (<https://www.bcponline.org/>), in section for the Ministration to the Sick, there are four prayers listed for use by a sick person. The final one on that page is titled “In the Morning”. Many of you will recognise this line from it, “If I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly.” There are days like that for all of us, not just those who are sick.

Doing nothing can sometimes be an act of nurture (nurture of ourselves or nurture of others). It can also be an act of courage. It might be to refrain from an action or an unwise or unhelpful word.

Care of others may simply be a case of being the less anxious voice, the oasis of calm. If we look at the psalm, we place our trust in the Lord. We do not put our ultimate trust in the powers of this world, and we do not join others who take the path of acts or attitudes that do not accord with who we are as God's people.

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, being loved gives you strength, but loving deeply makes you brave. He also said, "From caring comes courage."

That inner strength, care and courage, knowing our differences but confident in our shared faith, can be the daily context of our lives.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he is very conscious of the differences between people who have traditionally seen themselves as different from one another but who are all part of God's family, all followers of Jesus. What does our reading from Romans say about caring for one another?

Specifically, Paul spoke of the circumcised as those who had been expecting Jesus from prophesy and their own tradition, and of the Gentiles as those who were now learning about Jesus.

We might transfer this encouragement as being for us as followers of Jesus, and for all to whom we might reach out and share the good news.

Paul says to both these groups, Welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Jesus has become a servant of his people on behalf of the truth of God, in order that he might confirm the promises given to those who were expecting him, and in order that those who did not yet know him might glorify God for his mercy.

Those promises are for all.

Paul finishes with, May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, build up your neighbour, live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all walk together in the light of Christ, caring for one another and helping to equip one another for this great task. Amen.