

PROJECT COMPASSION & ENCOUNTER: WOMAN AT THE WELL

Jn 4.5-42 Ex 17.3-7 Rom 5.1-8

We've had a strange and scary start to 2020, with fires, floods and now coronavirus, rampantly spreading across the global village of 7 billion plus of us members of humanity. Some see it as a storm in a teacup, but the reality is far from it, as it spreads rapidly throughout the world, knowing no boundaries or walls, as some ignoramuses might want to have us believe.

The Spanish Flu pandemic (as it was known) of 1918-1919 is said to have killed something like 17 million people (comparable to the total deaths resulting from the First World War!), when the world's population was 1.9 billion, so somewhere around 3% died, while 500 million people, 27% of the total population were infected, most recovering, the very young, sick and very old most prone to dying as a result.

With the world population now over 7 billion and air travel so common and widespread, and this current coronavirus being so virulent and contagious, it is only wise to heed of the practical advice of professionals in the scientific and medical fields to take necessary precautions against contracting and/or spreading this disease, particularly by washing hands thoroughly, not shaking hands or kissing, or touching one's face, which is almost impossible to prevent, as it's a spontaneous and subconscious reflex action for all of us, so keep clear of each other as realistically as possible, and self-isolate when you're sniffing, have a sore throat or are feverish with a high temperature. Our health care system is much better than back in 1918, but there are limits to which it can be stretched, for those who need critical care, so let us all be aware and take care.

In some parts of the world, as in Ireland, Canada and elsewhere, Bishops have advised that parish weekend Masses not be celebrated and that school be closed for a temporary period, so that groups of over 250 people, as opposed to 500 here, are discouraged from gathering together in a confined space. The Victorian Government, and now Victorian diocesan bishops have issued a statement, to heighten our awareness of each individual's responsibility to be sensible in responding to the current situation, so let's take note accordingly.

Today's Gospel is a classic tale from John's Gospel, relating a personal face to face encounter between Jesus and the despised woman at Jacob's historic well, mainly because she was a Samaritan, and then because she was implicitly a big sinner, given that she is transparent to Jesus as a woman who had had some difficulty in relationships, it might be assumed, especially if she had 5 prior husbands, apart from her current partner!!

The symbolism of the water (as I often say, H₂O, without which there cannot be life), is clear, as Jesus offers her living water, once she somewhat reluctantly responds to him, as he surprisingly asks her for a drink, himself in a fatigued state. John present Jesus as Saviour of the world, a high Christological expression, reflective of the universal nature of Jesus' mission and that of his disciples, set an example by the Samaritan woman as the first missionary to go back and tell the others the Good News of Jesus, Jesus who transcends the ethnic and social boundaries by engaging and encouraging the Samaritan woman to whom he offers the *'living water'*, which for us prefigures the waters of Baptism, sending or missioning us to be disciples who bring the Gospel or evangelize the world in which we live and move.

The Project Compassion theme this year is *"Go Further Together"*, as I recommend you view the story of Barry, an indigenous man who has reformed his life, in order to raise and support his family of 4 daughters, facilitating Red Dust cultural healing program in Western NSW, further informing us of the great work being supported by Caritas Australia through Project Compassion. (*It's on the Project Compassion website.*)

We might once again conclude with a prayer together, with slideshow, based on our themes for Lent:

God of all peoples and nations, as you accompany us on our Lenten journey, may our fasting strengthen our commitment to live in solidarity, our almsgiving be an act of justice, and our prayers anchor us in love and compassion. Awaken our hearts and minds that we might be one human family as we all go further together. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

john hannon

15th March 2020

PROJECT COMPASSION MATERIAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Father of four, Barry, embodies resilience and strength. Growing up in a tough environment, he had to look inside himself to make the right choices for himself and his family.

Barry, a Gamilaroi man originally from western NSW, remembers his early years as a time of enormous hardship. He didn't have a stable home or support network and was mostly brought up by his grandparents.

He became a father in his late teens and was suddenly faced with responsibilities for which he wasn't ready. He started drinking heavily, behaviour that he'd witnessed previously.

Barry, and others like him, were able to take part in Red Dust Healing – a cultural healing program, which encourages participants to examine their own personal hurt and allows them to heal from within. The program addresses family and personal relationships, and what may have been lifelong patterns of violence, abuse and neglect.

Red Dust Healing Founder, Tom Powell, is humbled that the program has won numerous awards and helped over 16,000 people like Barry across Australia.

Today, thanks to the Red Dust Healing program, Barry is an inspirational father to his four girls and a respected leader in his community. He now facilitates Red Dust Healing workshops and

helps others through their healing process. A brighter future for men, women and their families can start today. Let's Go Further, Together.

In today's gospel we hear about the woman of Samaria who was engaged in a very truthful encounter with Jesus. The Jews despised the Samaritans as having no claim on their God. This nameless woman, an outcast from her own community, chose to visit the well at a time to avoid those who judged her harshly.

It's important to acknowledge how radical this encounter was. Jesus reaches out to her as he did to outcasts demonstrating that all people are valuable to God. In this way we too are called to be radical, to uphold the dignity of all people.

The exchange was so profound, bringing about a change of heart for the Samaritan woman. She then became a witness for Jesus, influencing those around her.

This week we hear the story of Barry, an Indigenous Australian man who through a Caritas Australia supported program, Red Dust Healing, was able to confront

destructive patterns in his life. Red Dust Healing is an Indigenous led program in which participants learn culturally appropriate tools to empower them

to overcome addiction, mental health, grief, abuse and other challenges. For Barry, it changed his life and helped him to recognise his hurt and anger stemmed primarily from rejection and grief. It provided a safe space to talk and connect with others who've supported each other in their healing journey. The program

has also helped Barry connect back with his culture, language and stories.

Just as the Samaritan woman went on to share her revelation with others, Barry also shares the richness of his experience. His community is striving forward, facing the challenges of intergenerational trauma, past oppression and colonisation together.

How can we manifest the radical love of Christ in order to break down barriers of injustice?