

**Sunday, March 08, 2026**  
The Third Sunday In Lent

**Solemn Eucharist**  
11:00 am

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

on  
John 4:5–42

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## **The Bridge-Builder**

*We must remain 'Bridge Builders.' Even as diplomatic windows seem to slam shut, the Church must keep the doors of reconciliation open. We refuse to see our neighbors as enemies, whether they be in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or the military bases of the Gulf. I extend an urgent invitation to the wider Anglican Communion and all people of goodwill: Intercede for us now."* Words of our friend, Hosam Naoum, the Archbishop of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East.

I was struck by those words and especially when he said *'We refuse to see our neighbors as enemies, whether they be in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or the military bases of the Gulf.'* Of course, the countries currently affected by Operation Epic Fury and the retaliation by the Iranian regime all fall within the borders of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East – the people of Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan-Iraq, Jordan, and Qatar are Archbishop Hosam's neighbors. It was, therefore, very poignant have another old friend, Bishop Michael Lewis, the previous Archbishop of the province with us last Sunday. As I said in my message in our weekly newsletter, many people feel that these are perilous times and, as both Bishop Michael and Archbishop Hosam have said, we must pray even harder for peace and justice to reign.

For the Christian, war, even when considered just, is still a sign of failure and a reminder of the fallen nature of humanity; it is a sign to all that dialogue and diplomacy have failed. In all my years as a priest, and particularly when I organized the homecoming services at Exeter Cathedral for the Royal Marines who had been deployed in Afghanistan, I never met one who glorified war or saw it as inevitable.

So, I have been reflecting on Archbishop Hosam's words about not falling into the trap of seeing neighbors as enemies. It made me think hard about my own growing up in a depressed industrial city in the North of England during the 1960s. Until I was almost 18, you may be surprised to hear that I never left Yorkshire, except once, when our music teacher took a group of us to London for a BBC Prom Concert. My parents holidayed every summer just 30 miles from home at the seaside. All 1200 students at my high school were white and I remember being told about other people and other races, only it was less about skin pigmentation and much more about difference. I am very sorry, Fr. Luigi, but I was taught not to trust Italians and never to set foot in a Roman Catholic Church! I was also told not to trust Jews, never to speak to Germans, and to do be careful when speaking to (what we called them at that time) 'Gypsies.'

I guess, as a baby-boomer growing up in the North East of England, like my peers, we were still affected by war – the Second World War and those stories were very much a part of my early years. Rationing of

food had only just ceased, and bomb damage was still visible in the city of Hull where I grew up. During the Second World War, my father was in active deployment with the Royal Air Force; my uncles were all in the Army and the Royal Navy. One was killed, and another found himself in a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp and almost died of starvation. They, and my mother and my aunts never forgot it; and it prejudiced their opinions about people who were different from themselves.

And all of this brings me to a well.

The woman who meets Jesus at the well is a Samaritan and the author of the Fourth Gospel leaves us no doubt about how Samaritans were treated by non-Samaritans: *'Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.'* Jesus, himself, revealed some of the prejudice towards Samaritans when he said, *"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."* And this extraordinary exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan is further enhanced by the fact that she is a woman and Jesus is known as a Rabbi. When his disciples catch up with him at the well, the writer of the Fourth Gospel says, *'They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"'*

In this encounter, Jesus not only breaks established protocols and traditions, he begins to break down the walls of prejudice and division. He does something new, remarkable, and life-transforming and his dialogue creates a new opportunity. As *the bridge-builder*, Jesus was able to teach his disciples a new way. In a sense, it is rather good that they didn't ask him why he was speaking to a woman, let alone a Samaritan, because they ended up staying with her and her friends for two more days!

Jesus calls us into a new kind of relationship with God **and with one another in exactly the same way.** When Archbishop Hosam says that he refuses to see neighbors as enemies, he takes a risk for, indeed, we know full well that some of his extreme neighbors would like to see him dead. When King Abdullah of Jordan says that terrorism has no place in Islam, there are some extremists who, similarly, would want to see him dead. My friends, these are perilous times but as both Archbishop Hosam and King Abdullah – from two different yet Abrahamic Faith traditions – have tried to say so many times, that difference does not have to bring prejudice, and the answer to combatting evil does not always have to be violence or war. Of course, my friends, that is easier said than done.

In 1982 the, then, British Council of Churches created **Four Principles of Inter-Faith Dialogue adopted.** They were adopted as a way that people of faith and conviction could dialogue and, therefore, begin the process of working together not as strangers but as friends. They might help us today.

1. *Dialogue begins when people meet.*
2. *Dialogue depends on mutual trust and mutual understanding.*
3. *Dialogue makes possible service to the Community.*

and, importantly,

4. *Dialogue becomes a medium of authentic witness.*

A few weeks ago, Fr. Luigi spoke about the shape of God. if we turn that concept on its head, what is the shape by which we recognize the Christian? Is it someone like you or me? Is it someone who looks like me, shares my views, my orthodox faith, my spiritual practices? As we think about the shape of the

Christian, there is one image that we should be drawn to – the image of Christ on the Cross. When Jesus met the woman at the well, it was the hottest part of the day. The woman saw that he was being a typical man – “Give me a drink woman!” He had no bucket, but she did. Could his exchange with her have helped Jesus understand his vocation as the bridge builder; the one who would draw *all* people into the orbit of God’s love? His vocation to end enmity, prejudice, and strife – to sow the seeds of a world where there is no more war, no pain, no suffering? How did he do this? On Calvary, at the same hour, the hottest part of the day, Jesus opened wide the arms of God’s love to embrace not just the Samaritan, but all humanity. From the cross, Jesus said again “I *thirst*” but this time, his thirst was for the ending, once for all, of the gulf that separated fallen humanity from the Creator. A soldier pierced his side and from his broken heart flowed blood and water. Jesus said to the woman at the well, “*Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*”

Some words of Basil Hume, a former Archbishop of Westminster:

*As he hung on the Cross a new alliance was made between God and man. The Bridge-Builder was indeed bridging the gulf which separates man from God. He was making retribution for the enormity of the insult which sin is. He was; as Priest, offering himself as Victim in a new sacrifice which would seal in his blood the new Covenant with God. A new people of God was born. Peter wept and was saved. Judas? ... Poor Judas. <sup>[1]</sup>*

## References

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- 1 Cardinal Basil Hume: from ‘Searching for God’ 1977 Hodder & Stoughton, p. 159
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