

## **Views from the Pews – John 4:1-26 Revisited**

Jesus and the disciples had avoided both Hamas and Israeli patrols on their dangerous trek across northern Gaza. While Jesus headed for the only known source of reliable water in the area, the disciples headed for an aid agency to see if any food might be available.

Jesus sits, weary from a long and dangerous journey into territory where Jews aren't welcome. No sooner has he sat than a Gazan woman appears, carrying as many water containers as she can manage. Jesus, lacking any container (let alone a rope to lower it into the well) asks for her help.

A cultural problem immediately arises. The woman explains the problem; the two communities have 'no dealings', with each other. Jesus deals very cleverly with this, but not in a way we'd expect. He speaks about identity, about some hidden power he has, and about the possibility of some other – different – water. About a different type of thirst, which is quenchable by some form of radical change.

But Jesus also points to what the two of them have in common; he refers to 'our father Jacob', who was the well's donor, and to Jacob's family, who along with their cattle, were ancient beneficiaries of the well's existence.

The woman too remembers that 'our fathers worshipped on this mountain' Again, she is a partner in some attempt at common ground – important in a place stalked by thirst.

This mutual attempt to find common ground leads to all sorts of unforeseen developments, including the woman's recognition of the Messiah, and her successful efforts to encourage His recognition among fellow Samaritans.

This being John, there is a great deal of theology contained in these verses, not all of which can be unpacked here.

Secondly, Sychar in Samaria is a long way from Gaza.

But the one thing we might take away from this story today is Jesus' *modus operandi*, when faced with cultural and political differences. He immediately points out what he and the woman share, not what divides them. He gently leads the conversation away from the barriers between the two, towards His identity as a Saviour of both cultures. He is clear that the Living Water is available to all, regardless of race or creed.

The thinking that propels the current Gazan conflict is totally contrary to God's plans.

*Richard Swarbrick*