

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT – YEAR A

Psalm 94 (95)



This psalm of praise is said every day by many of the religious, ordained, and lay people who say the Morning Prayer of the Church.

It is a prayer for collective worship, sometimes known as the *Venite*: 'Let us come ...'

It follows the traditional pattern of a hymn of praise.

First comes an invitation to praise the Lord using physical movement (*bow, bend, kneel*) and musical instruments, in this case our voice (*hail the Lord with songs*).

Then follow reasons for praising God, usually introduced with the word 'for' or 'because'.

Finally there is a conclusion, generally expressing a wish.

After the initial praise, we also hear the voice of God in the concluding stanza. By using the word 'today', the Lord's wish that we should remember and learn from the mistakes of the Israelites during the Exodus in Massah and Meribah – two words respectively meaning 'testing' and 'grumbling or quarrelling' – where they complained to Moses because there was no food. They did the same later on when they came to a place where there was no water; once again they questioned God's goodness.

The psalmist's audience and we ourselves in the present century can learn from the Israelites' experience.

Gospel John 4: 5–15

This story is only found in John's Gospel. It is one of several life-changing personal encounters between individuals and Jesus, such as Nicodemus; the royal official; the man born blind; Pilate; Mary Magdala; and Thomas, among others.

Sychar, a Samaritan town

This is not found on maps of the area. Some scholars think it is a Greek corruption of Sechem; others that it is the village of Askar. Both are close to Jacob's well.

Jacob's well

The well is about 125 feet deep. It is not, as many other wells in the area, a cistern filled with collected rain water which could become stale and polluted in hot weather. It is fed by underground springs and the waters remain fresh and cool. This is why at that time people called the water from this well 'living water'.

As well as the literal meaning of 'running water', it is an Old Testament expression meaning divine revelation or vitality (see Jeremiah 2: 13; 17:13; or Ezekiel 47: 1–12).

In John's Gospel, the term also indicates the Holy Spirit (7: 38–39).

Most Samaritan women would have collected water in the cool of the morning. The well was a place where they could socialise. The woman of the story may have been avoiding them, perhaps feeling ostracised or rejected because of her chequered marital history.

'Give me a drink'

Jesus breaks down traditional social barriers. Men only spoke directly in a public place to women who were blood relatives.

Jews and Samaritans

The Samaritans were Jews who interbred with foreigners brought in from Babylonia and Media by the Assyrian conquerors in 722BC to settle the land with inhabitants who would be loyal to them.

They did not recognise Jerusalem as the place to worship God. They worshipped on Mt Gerizim, close to the town of Shechem.

They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, but were looking forward to the coming of a Messiah.

Jews considered Samaritans and their possessions as ritually unclean. John skilfully uses misunderstanding, irony, and changes of subject to portray Jesus breaking social taboos such as gender discrimination, ritual purity, religious hostility, and the moral stigma attached to several marriages.

