



## Pause to pray - week 2 - 17th April

*"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) [John 4:9]*

For many people in our world, the very idea of engaging with the Christian message or becoming a follower of Jesus is probably the last thing they could ever imagine. They are not antagonistic or particularly negative about Christian faith, they just see it as something for other people; something for people who are not like them; something that they would simply never give a second thought to. Some might even harbour a vague aspiration of having a more defined faith, but assume that they are simply not good enough or sufficiently religious for that ever to become a reality. Like the Samaritan woman, they might well be surprised that we are even interested in them becoming followers of Jesus.

If we're honest, churches can sometimes reinforce such ideas. It is very easy to become inward looking; to use language and follow routines that, while familiar to us, are alien and bewildering to others. Without even trying, we can offer an unconscious message that church is only for people like us.

Jesus could so easily have followed the familiar routines of his own day. Samaritans and Jews did not get on; they lived separate lives; inhabited separate worlds and avoided each other as much as possible. Jesus chose not to perpetuate those cultural norms by ignoring the woman, getting his own water or just staying thirsty. Instead he saw beyond the usual prejudices, and acted differently to include and engage with this woman, with remarkable consequences.

As we pause to pray today, we might ask ourselves some questions. Who are the people we know who feel "outside" of God's community? Who are the people who believe that faith is only for others and what can we do to offer them a different perspective? Who have we overlooked or assumed to be beyond the boundaries of God's love? Are there ways in which we can include those who aren't like us, who might well be described as belonging to a "different tribe"?

**God, who made all people in your image;  
Creator of a world that is rich and diverse,  
Help us not to conform to the narratives of division,  
But see all people as those who can share with us,  
In your story of love, hope and acceptance.  
When we find ourselves in unfamiliar places  
With people who might easily be called "different"  
Open our eyes to see how we might become the channels of your presence.  
We pray today for those who, for any reason,  
Feel outside and beyond the bounds of your Kingdom.  
Help us to challenge every prejudice,  
And overcome every barrier that stands in their way.**

**AMEN**