

Welcome – Unexpected Grace

Isaiah 55 v 1 and 8-9 - The welcome of God

Unexpected Grace is when we receive a great blessing even when we did not expect it.

When I was growing up in the seventies, showing my age now...even before DVDs or VHS, and certainly before the internet!...a tradition of Easter was to watch the film *Ben Hur*, when it came on TV. I was always moved by parts of the film, and when I came to faith in Christ, when I was 19, some parts of the film really came to life.

The scene where Judah Ben Hur is a Roman prisoner and chained to other soldiers as they are marched through the Galilean wilderness...

He is so thirsty, and about to die of thirst. The centurion will not give him any water, and a stranger, who was working in his carpenter's shop, steps forward and gives Judah Ben Hur a cup of cold water – despite the aggression of the centurion.

The actor who played the centurion was an extra on the set, and had not really acted before, but the way that he stands in awe of the stranger who refreshes Ben Hur is brilliant.

Enjoy this clip of the film:

<https://youtu.be/tVlf7OiiTJE>



Jesus gives Ben Hur a drink of water

The beauty of the film is that Jesus's face is never seen, but His presence is felt. That in itself is refreshing.

This is arguably, the best scene of Christ ever filmed, and it's because it's so subtle.

Did you notice Judah Ben Hur at the beginning, hunched over, without hope? Look at him at the end, standing tall, willing to carry on.

Christ has refreshed him with water and this made a huge impact on his life.

Jesus worked no flashy miracle here - just a drink of cold water. But the cup of water represents more than physical water.

We now hear from Gillian, and our reading is from **Matthew 10 v40-42**.

V42 *If anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.*

A cup of cold water...how small a gesture, and yet how life transforming.

This speaks to me today of being refreshed, and it asks the question...*Who is refreshing you at this time?* For as we continue through the lockdown experience, we need to be continually refreshed.

We need that cup of cold water.

Who is a refreshing person in your life?

Some people have a real gift of refreshing others!

There are so many small but crucial touches in this little film clip - the simple gift of cold water, the look of astonishment on the centurion's face. The change coming over Ben Hur. Jesus's carpenter work shop, the lack of dialogue, the quiet music - all add up to make this a memorable scene.

But we know that this is more than a movie, because it sums up the life of Jesus Christ. It captures the spirit of Jesus – the humility, the compassion, the concern for injustice.

The gospel writer John wrote, *The word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the only begotten Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* **1 v14**

The disciples recognised something special in Jesus, just as Ben Hur did that day.

The Apostle Paul said that Jesus was the image of the invisible God. **Colossians 1v15**. You can't get a higher accolade than that.

In the film, Jesus' face is never seen - yet His presence speaks for Him far better than any words could.

That is what God is for us.

We do not see Him but we know Him; We cannot touch Him but we feel him; We cannot hold Him but He holds us.

In the encounter with the stranger, Judah Ben Hur walked away from the village strengthened, refreshed, and given hope, and all from the comfort of a stranger. A very special stranger, who was to appear again later in the film, when the tables are turned and Jesus is carrying His cross and on His way to Calvary.

He stumbles and falls to the ground under the weight of the cross.

The Gospels tell a story not too dissimilar from this one, where a woman comes to the well for water. A woman who is thirsty, not just for physical water but spiritual water. Jesus risks His reputation in speaking to a Samaritan woman but His compassion for her is evident throughout the account. This story is from **John chapter 4**.

The first act of unexpected grace comes from God. He wants to refresh us. In **Psalm 23 v2 & 3**, it is written, *He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul.*

We are invited to come to Him to be replenished and refreshed. It is an invitation to the thirsty. To those who know their need for God.

The prophet Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus, called the people of his day to come to God...everyone who is thirsty, come and find water....

Elaine will read this for us now.

Isaiah 55 v1, 8 & 9

God's invitation has been there since the beginning. It's an invitation for all who are struggling in life, all who know their need for God, to simply come to Him and receive the gift of life.

Jesus said, to the woman at the well...**John 4:13,14** *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never*

thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

The woman at the well; the many people in the Gospels, whose life Jesus touched - those who were thirsty for living water - this continued after the life of Christ, into the early church and down through the ages.

The Spirit of Jesus is not dead. He comes to us in different ways. He comes to us in the stranger and Jesus himself said, *It is for all who know their need - it is for all mankind, all are welcome to this unexpected grace and so are we.*

What is this living water that Jesus is speaking about?

As we heard last week, God has His eyes on the sparrow, the least, the little ones. Jesus said, He knows every sparrow that falls to the ground. God's eyes are on us and they are also on those who might be our allies, our partners in the gospel. Those who offer us encouragement and refreshment.

We all need the cup of encouragement when we are doing the Lord's work. It's easy to throw cold water over a fire and put it out, but God wants that cup of cold water to go to the one who is doing His work, to refresh him or her.

Who are our encouragers, they may not share our faith, they may not come to our church, but nonetheless they are in our corner and willing to support us?

This verse tells us that it is important to receive their cup of comfort. It is important for us to receive charity. God sees it and will reward it.

Then the other side of the coin is this...How do we refresh others?

For it works both ways – we are both refreshed and then we become refreshers.

Proverbs 11v25 – *Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

So be encouragers...Be people who give out compliments and build others up. Give that cup of cold water, that encouraging word to your brother or sister, for who knows that might just make all the difference.