YOUR NEIGHBOUR IS THIRSTY
Model Talk

BIBLE READING: JOHN 4:3-29

UNSEEN SUFFERING

BEGINNING OPTION A:

Start by sharing a short story of a time when you encountered someone suffering in poverty on the periphery of society… someone unseen, or unnoticed by many, perhaps someone you met on a Tearfund trip.

Reflect on the fact that many people's suffering goes unnoticed. You just happened to be there to witness the above story, but their situation isn't reported on in the news, it's not in the papers. As we go about our lives at home – our comfortable lives – people on the fringes, or in countries far away, continue to suffer. And, it goes unnoticed.

But, these stories are happening all the time and go unseen by many of us. Families around the world face extreme challenges and crises, and it goes unseen… unless, by chance, it happens to make it into the mainstream news.

BEGINNING OPTION B:

One thing I have noticed, since being involved with Tearfund, is this: there are so many tragedies that occur in the world that never get spoken about. I'm often deeply moved when I hear from Tearfund about issues such as slavery and trafficking of children in South Asia, or parents that need to scavenge for food in ants' nests to feed their children in Chad.

Yet these stories rarely, if ever, make it into the mainstream news. These stories are happening all the time and go unseen by many of us. Families around the world face extreme challenges and crises, and it goes unseen…

Here's the thing: as we see in the Bible, Jesus goes out of his way to engage with people who are 'off the radar': people who are suffering on the fringes, people in crisis on the periphery. More than that, think about what Jesus is up to when he encounters people. He is often on the way to somewhere, or busy teaching, or taking time away to pray. Yet, he notices people, he stops, he turns aside, he pays attention, and he helps.

- A woman who has been bleeding for many years reaches out and touches his clothes in a busy crowd, and he stops, turns, and heals. (Luke 8:43-48)
- A blind beggar on the side of the road shouts over '...have mercy on me' and Jesus turns aside, and heals him. (Luke 18:35-43)
- A centurion interrupts his journey with a call for help, and Jesus stops what he is doing, listens to the problem, and changes his plans so he can help. (Luke 7:1-10)
- Zacchaeus, a tax collector, is up a tree trying to get a view of Jesus through the crowds, and Jesus stops, calls to him and ends up transforming his life. (Luke 19:1-10)

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Jesus sees these people when others may not have noticed. These are also people who he 'shouldn't' have stopped for (unclean, gentile, tax collector etc). In fact, he seems to purposely search out the unnoticed, the shunned, the disadvantaged and those in need.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

We see this clearly in our Bible passage today: John 4:3-29, the story of the Samaritan Woman.

The story begins with Jesus travelling, with his disciples, from Judea to Galilee. Samaria was in between. It might not seem unusual that he had to go through Samaria, other than, for a Jew, Samaria was hostile territory. The Samaritans were age-old enemies of the Jews. So much so that most Jews, when travelling from Judea to Galilee, would actually add two days to their journey by walking all the way around Samaria in order to avoid travelling through it.

But, not Jesus. Jesus goes right to the heart of Samaria.

Jesus arrives at the town of Sychar and he sits down by the side of a well because he was tired. It is midday and it would have been hot.

'Will you give me a drink?' Jesus asked the woman as she began to draw her water from the well. This question would have made her jump! A man, talking to a woman alone in public, would have been highly unlikely. A religious figure talking with a woman, definitely not. A Jewish leader talking to a Samaritan woman – never!

But, Jesus breaks all these barriers. He shows us that his gospel is for anyone, any gender, race, status… all are welcome.

Jesus sees this woman. He doesn't just strike up a conversation by chance to pass the time. This woman's life was a mess and there was a lot of pain for her. Jesus knew this and identified the wounds in her life. He knows her well, he knows all about her. She has had five husbands and was living with a sixth man. And whether you interpret that as a life of adultery, or a life of abuse and abandonment, one thing is for sure: this woman was not experiencing life in all its fullness. But, Jesus drew close to her. Jesus took time to hear her… to restore her he took time to go deeper with her.

And, they arrive at a key point in their conversation… water. Jesus connects her most basic and urgent human needs: thirst for water and thirst for spiritual fulfillment.

He says to her: 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (John 4:13–14).

Thirst isn't really an issue in Scotland…I could imagine thirst was a much greater reality for this woman at the well. Water was a precious resource you had to work hard for, taking time and effort to journey to a well, carrying what you could. Thirst was a very real threat.

Here, Jesus is offering her the chance to never go thirsty again. The Samaritan woman jumps at it, saying: 'Sir, give me this water!' What she doesn't realise is that what Jesus is offering her is living water… deep, fulfilling and satisfying spiritual nourishment.

What Jesus offers her – and what he offers us today – is the opportunity to be deeply and fully fulfilled, and satisfied. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection, he offers spiritual restoration and fulfillment at the deepest possible levels to those who trust in him, and follow him – a life source 'welling up' in us to eternal life. This is water no one else can offer, this water no well can access. Only Jesus can provide this.

How does she react?
'Then, **leaving her water jar**, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"' (John 4:28-29)

She left her water behind.
She had met with Jesus, the Messiah. She left her water behind and went to tell people about Jesus. He has living water: he fulfills, satisfies, and gives eternal life.

Not only that, she ran to tell other people about Jesus. She wanted other people to taste this living water too.

Jesus is the thirst quencher and he's able to meet everyone's needs, whether they be spiritual or physical. All through the gospels we read, time and time again, of Jesus coming face to face with extreme needs. Paralysed, blind, demon possessed, lepers, hungry – and time and time again, he fulfills that need. He provides. He heals. He blesses. He forgives. He feeds.

In this story, Jesus breaks through cultural barriers, reaches out to someone he should never have known and provides for her, bringing restoration to her life.

Let me tell you about a lady who lives in Ethiopia...
But first, we're going to see a short film.

SHOW FILM: ORBISA

My friends at Tearfund Scotland recently spent some time visiting Tearfund's work in Ethiopia, specifically visiting a region called Afar.

Afar is in the north-east of Ethiopia and is a very hot, dry, remote place. It's not a particularly well-visited place – even Ethiopians from other parts of the country don't really like to go there. Teachers and contractors are sent to Afar, stay for a few days, then leave. People tend not to stick around. Afar is home to nomadic people who keep goats and camels. My friends spent some time with these communities and heard their stories.

It was here that they met Orbisa, and her family.
They sat with Orbisa and she told them about her life.

In the past, if her family needed water, they would only have to go a short distance, a five minute walk to find a source of water, perhaps to a river, or a stream.

However, over the past five years or so, the water has dried up. Throughout the region there are many riverbeds, the earth now cracked and dry where there would once have been water. The rainy season that could be expected for perhaps three or four months of the year is now down to just one short season.

Orbisa spoke about how they have been waiting year after year for things to go back to the way they were – but it never does. The situation is only getting worse, as the impact of climate change wreaks havoc on the environment and on the land. She is feeling the effects of climate change in the here and now.

Because of this, Orbisa now has to set off at around 4am, each day, on a round trip that takes up to ten hours in order to fetch water from the nearest water source. And this is common throughout the region of Afar now. She said that the water they are able to collect is often dirty, and they get sick because of it. She also has to contend with dangers in her journey to get the water, such as hyena and leopard attacks.

Orbisa said that she can carry nowhere near the amount of water for her family's daily needs. This means she often has to put her kids to bed complaining that they are thirsty. She just has to tell them to wait until the next day. Because of all of this, Orbisa's life is one of struggle, anxiety and hopelessness.

REFLECTION

Here in Scotland, we don't hear about Afar and what people are going through there. It's not in the news or in the papers. Orbisa's suffering continues and it goes unseen – along with many more families in Afar. As we go about our lives, in relative comfort, Orbisa continues to struggle. Unseen. She is off our radar.

But, one thing is for sure, Jesus sees her. Jesus knows the pain and the struggle she goes through each day to keep her family alive and well. What if Jesus were to meet with Orbisa… what if, after her daily five hour walk to get to a source of water, Jesus was sitting there, and he began to strike up a conversation – what would he say?

I believe Jesus wants to provide for Orbisa's needs, both spiritually, and practically. Like the woman at the well, I believe Jesus would break down barriers to make sure Orbisa knew that she was seen, listened to, cared for and restored.

TWO VILLAGES

When the team from Tearfund Scotland were in Orbisa's village, the overwhelming feeling was that it was lifeless. There seemed to be a lack of joy. The children sat still, not playing, not laughing. There was an intensity in the air.

But, on their last day in Afar, they visited another village. One that had just received a new water source provided by Tearfund's partner. As soon as they entered the village they could see, and hear, that things were very different here. Right in the middle of the village water flowed powerfully through a large tap, as women filled up barrel after barrel of fresh water chatting loudly together in groups. Children played in the misty overspill of water that bounced off the barrels. There was so much noise, so much laughter.

One of the Ethiopian colleagues turned to the team and said, 'Where there is water, there is life.' The analogy that Jesus gave about the living water that wells up to eternal life means so much more to me now.

‘WHERE THERE IS WATER, THERE IS LIFE.’

Where Jesus goes, he brings life. Jesus has called us to love our neighbour, and we know that to love our neighbour, sometimes we have to do what Jesus did and go off-radar: find the people, the families who are suffering on the periphery, out of sight. Whether they are children who are trapped in slavery in south-east Asia, families who have to scavenge from ants’ nests to survive in Chad, or women, like Orbisa, who have no option but to put their kids to bed thirsty.

One thing I love about Tearfund is the tagline ‘Following Jesus where the need is greatest’. The good news is that in places of the greatest need, like Afar, we often see Jesus at work through his people or his church.

In Afar, Tearfund’s partner Friendship Support Association are now in the process of providing fresh, clean, abundant, local water for villages like Orbisa’s. So far they have dug two wells, but they want to dig many, many more. We too want to follow Jesus where the need is greatest, and we want to provide, and bless abundantly, like Jesus does.

ASK

Those words are so striking… **where there is water, there is life.**

That desperate situation that Orbisa and her children are in is heartbreaking, however, I am excited there is something we can do about it. I’d like to ask you, today, to consider your neighbours in Afar. Your unseen neighbours who are thirsty.

I know that £12 per month has the potential to enable Tearfund to provide abundant, clean, local water for 12 households a year in Afar. For the cost of a Marks & Spencer Saturday night meal for two, a family – like Orbisa’s – could have their lives completely turned around.

Tearfund are doing work like this to help people all around the world. If you feel led to join us in helping people, like Orbisa, you can do so simply by heading to **www.tearfund.org/givewater** where you will be able to give. We’d be really grateful for your support.

I would also like to ask you to pray. To pray with Tearfund as they follow Jesus where the need is greatest, and pray for Orbisa, and her family, that they will know the love of Jesus, the living water that only he can provide, but also the physical water that they so urgently need.

Let’s pray.

tearfund *Following Jesus where the need is greatest*

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