

Take a moment to talk with someone near you about the reading. Was there something that surprised you, that you didn't understand, or that encouraged you?

For the last couple of weeks we have read a story from Genesis 26. It is a story about Isaac. He and his family were living in the area of Gerar and he had become very wealthy, with lots of servants and animals. The problem was that he was a threat to the people who lived in the land. He had grown very powerful and would have been able to attack them if he wanted. Obviously, in the desert, water is vital for survival and it is very precious. Isaac's father, Abraham, had spent many years in that land and had dug wells for his animals, which Isaac would have had the right to use. So, in order to get rid of Isaac the Philistines filled in the wells so there was no water.

However, Isaac knew where to dig because he knew where his father had found water. The thing is that it is not easy to dig in the heat of the desert and it would have taken almost as long to dig out the well as it had done to open it up in the first place. Actually, filling in the well could have been considered an act of war and Isaac would have been justified in attacking the Philistines, however, he chose a path of peace.

In the bible names often have a specific and important meaning. Gerar is a dry and arid place. Isaac had just received the blessing of God but he now found himself in a dry place where he could not find water. How many people today, even those of us who have experienced the blessing of God, now find ourselves in a place where we struggle to find spiritual water?

The first well they reopened was called Esek, which means contention or strife, because they quarrelled with the local shepherds there. The second well was called Sitnah, and that means hatred – a much stronger emotion. Again, there were arguments over the water, so Isaac moved on again. The third time, the well was called Rehoboth, which means room or wide place.

This seems to be a place where they might settle because there is no argument over the well. Here things seem to settle down and there was time to get comfortable. However, Isaac decides that they need to go a bit further, so they go on. Genesis 26:24 *That night the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.'*

²⁵ *Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.*

While they are digging, King Abimelech arrives to meet Isaac and they form an alliance not to attack one another. Part of that is agreement that Isaac now has his own new well to provide water for his family and animals. Isaac named that place

Beersheba (Anne Ferguson had a photo on FB with her sitting at the well in Beersheba).

However, today is neither a history nor a geography lesson, so what does this have to do with Paul and the Ephesians, or with us? Think of someone you know and ask yourself what you would pray for them – are they ill, struggling financially, having a baby? What do they need from God? Take a moment to think about it.

Paul thought about the Christians in Ephesus and he would have remembered his time there – when there was a riot because people were becoming Christians. He could have prayed that they would have more faith, that they would be protected from their enemies, or that they would be bold in sharing their faith – but he doesn't. He prays that they would receive the Holy Spirit, so that they would know God better. I think that's an amazing thing to pray for

someone else. What he's saying is that the most important thing for people is to know God.

I think the story of Isaac and the wells has a spiritual significance for us as individuals and as a congregation.

Jeremiah 2:13 *'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'*

Knowing God is where life is. He is the source of living water – the very thing we need for life. Yet, time and time again, God's people have looked elsewhere for something to quench their spiritual thirst. In the OT they turned to worship other gods. I'm not totally sure what it is in our day but I think it relates to the third well Isaac dug – the one where it looked possible to settle. I think that for the last 70 or so years that's where the church has been. We've spent our time looking back to what our fathers did, drinking from their wells, doing what worked for them – not fully realising that everything had changed around us. This is the place where the devil works the hardest. This is the place where he works to get us to settle for what seems to be good enough. BUT, it is not what God has for us.

Isaac had to go a bit further. He had to open up his new well and as he was doing that God confirmed his promise of blessing. Have you settled for something that is good, but is not God's best? Are you looking back, relying on the past to guide the future? Are you looking to something other than Jesus for satisfaction? John 4:13-14 *Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."*

I think that we need to be asking God what it is he is going to bless in our day. What is going to be the way people in our community tap into Jesus, the source of life. How can we help other people get to know Jesus, in this generation?

One problem might be that with too many of us, bitter waters flow from our hearts, the water is dirty, mixed with impurities of life, because we are not taking time for ourselves to drink of the water of life. We're not experiencing new life, so we can't pass it on. Our spiritual wells can easily become so full of rubbish that the water of life doesn't really flow. It might trickle a bit but we're not impacting the world as we should. What causes that? Whatever we put before 'knowing' Jesus. When we know all of the characters in every soap, but don't know the characters in the bible; when we spend hours talking to friends on social media, but a few minutes talking with God; when we stop expecting God to do miracles; when we put ourselves first – there are so many ways and it will be different for each of us. I'm not saying that tv or social media is wrong, but there needs to be a balance. The point is that we need to spend time working out what it is in our lives that stops us living lives in which the life of God is so obvious that we can't hide it – those gushing fountains of endless life that Jesus talked about.