

# HEARERS OF THE WORD

Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95 (94); Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

## The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth

*As the gospel is very long, it is more practical to read it from your own Bible.*

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This story is found only in the Fourth Gospel. The first four chapters of this Gospel address the different “constituencies” of the Gospel’s readers: followers of the Baptist (1:19-51), the Jews (2:1-12), the Pharisees (3:1-21), the Samaritans (our Gospel today) and the Gentiles (4:46-54). The story is symbolic of the journey of faith, using marriage symbolism from the Old Testament.

### KIND OF WRITING

This story is a symbolic narrative, typical of John’s Gospel. There may be a remote historical basis, but as it stands it is not historical. Typically for this Gospel (i) there is a one-to-one encounter; (ii) the person encountered makes a considerable journey of faith (Jew, greater than Jacob, prophet, Christ, Saviour of the world); (iii) the exchanges have two layers of meaning (living water = running water). Intriguingly, this woman becomes a herald.

Jesus’ question about her husband is only an apparent change of subject—as her next observation shows. Jesus first tries to communicate using the symbolic language of water (= *worship*). He changes his approach, using the (equally) symbolic language of marriage (= *worship*). Finally, he has a breakthrough, using the symbolic language of the temple (= *worship*). Only a later, *moralising* reading thinks of Jesus as exposing the disastrous moral life of the woman, forgetting perhaps that it is not immoral to have five *husbands*—just unlucky.

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

(i) Often in the Bible, God’s covenant is described as a marriage bond:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed

OT Pattern	John 4
A man arrives at well	Jesus arrives at Jacob’s well
Women come to draw water	The woman comes to draw water
Some “problem” about the water	Jesus has no bucket; Jews don’t share utensils with Samaritans
Recognition scene	Very extended recognition of Jesus
The women go back to tell those at home	The Samaritan woman goes to tell the people in the town
The man is received	Jesus is received.
A wedding!	? See Jn 4:46!!

Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4–5)

(ii) Very often, New Testament stories are based on patterns in the Old Testament, which can be strikingly illuminating. Here, the “type scene” of meeting your future wife at a well is used, following Jacob (Genesis 29) and Moses (Exodus 2). The pattern is outlined in the box.

(iii) The Samaritans were regarded by their Jewish neighbours as “mongrel” believers. This helps us to understand the five husbands (= five deities, as we see):

The king of Assyria brought people

### Thought for the day

Today we are greatly helped by the wonderful Gospel of the Woman at the Well. On the third attempt, Jesus finally gets through to her but after that there is no stopping her. As Augustine teaches, she represents us: what do I thirst for? What is the most important thing in my life? Where do I now find God? By relentless challenge and resolute honesty, we too can be led to that encounter with Jesus, which changes everything, “giving life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” May we come to believe because we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.

### Prayer

In the midst of the ordinary things, loving God, you call us to the deeper realities: your thirst for us and our thirst for you. Never let us be satisfied, until we come to the springs of living water, welling up for eternal life.

from *Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim*, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. When they first settled there, they did not worship the Lord. (2 Kings 17:24–25a)

### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) In John 1-4, bridegroom language is used of Jesus: 2:1-11 and 3:29. (ii) After the scene at the well, the wedding feast of Cana is invoked, without apparent purpose: 4:46. This recalls the wedding feast and brings in the seventh stage of the type scene—but Jesus is the bridegroom, not of the Samaritans, but of the chosen people, the Jews, and of believing Christians. (iii) Images combining marriage and water for the Risen Jesus come up again in the book of Revelation:

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (Revelation 19:9) Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the sev-

en last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:9) The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears say, “Come.” And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. (Revelation 22:17)

ST PAUL

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verses 4-6** The scene is set and our interest awakened. Jacob’s well and our marriages (!) are recalled. (The preceding verses 1-3, recalling baptism, are vital to our understanding of this story.) Noon refers to time Jacob came to the well.

**Verses 7-15** John often uses ironic misunderstandings (clear to the reader) to provoke a deeper insight. “Living water” and “running water” are identical in Greek, hence the confusion of the woman. Jesus speaks of a spring (“flowing”) while the woman speaks of a well (“stagnant”). The Gospel reader recalls, of course, John 7:37-39:

*On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, ‘From within him will flow rivers of living water.’” (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)* (John 7:37–39 NET Bible; the NRSV is not at all accurate here.)

**Verses 16-26** Here we have an apparent change of subject to personal morality—but actually about authentic wor-

ship. The woman spots the change immediately and the conversation continues smoothly about genuine worship and what God desires of us. The expression “I am” echoes Exodus 3:14 and begins the long role of “I am” sentences unique to this Gospel (John 4:26; 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:9; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5–6, 8).

**Verses 27-38** Simultaneous telling is always tricky in narrative. The conversation with the disciples is a double echo: (i) of the Temptation about bread, otherwise not in this Gospel and (ii) of the sending out of the Twelve and the Seventy-two in Matthew, Mark and Luke, also not in this Gospel. The harvest has begun, including the bringing-in of the Samaritans, Pharisees, Gentiles and followers of the Baptist.

**Verses 39-42** This completes the sixth stage of the type scene and closes the story with a very advanced confession of the identity of Jesus. The seventh stage of the type-scene, that is, the wedding, is alluded to in the subsequent verse 46, which recalls the wedding feast of Cana, apparently to no purpose. Within the tradition, the messiah fulfils God’s marriage bond with his first chosen people, the Jews (represented by the mother in that account). The final speech of the townspeople is in the symbolic language of the Johannine community. Compare the wording in 1 John 1:1–4.

*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.* (1 John 1:1–4)



POINTERS FOR PRAYER

**1.** Jesus leads the woman along a wonderful journey towards a deeper and fuller life. You can enter the story with Jesus, the ideal leader, parent, teacher, or spiritual guide. Notice how he meets the woman where she is, needing her assistance, how he is patient with her, but also challenges her to grow to what she is capable of. Perhaps you have been such a teacher, or you can recall people who were.

**2.** You can also enter the story from the perspective of the woman’s journey. Notice the steps along the way: suspicion, distrust, curiosity, misunderstanding and conversion. Her journey was one in which a very human motivation attracted her to Jesus: the thought of having water in such a way that she did not have to come and draw it from the well. What have been the human motives that have attracted you to faith, prayer, religion, church and which have been stepping-stones to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus? Perhaps we can also see the same movement in the growth of some of our human relationships.

**3.** The woman’s final tactic is to attempt to buy time before responding (v. 25) —it will all happen sometime in the future. Jesus points out that the time for a faith response is NOW. How have you discovered the importance of the NOW moment?

PRAYER

O God, living and true, look upon your people, whose dry and stony hearts are parched with thirst. Unseal the living water of your Spirit; let it become within us an ever-flowing spring, leaping up to eternal life.

Thus may we worship you in spirit and in truth through Christ, our deliverance and hope, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, holy and mighty God for ever and ever. Amen.

1	Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7	Adam and Eve	Rom 5:12-19	Adam and Jesus	Mt 4:1-11	The Temptations
2	Gen 12:1-4	Abraham	2 Tim 1:8-10	God’s grace	Mt 17:1-9	Transfiguration
3	Ex 17:3-7	Moses	Rom 5:1-2, 5-8	God’s love	Jn 4:5-42	The Samaritan
4	1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13	David	Eph 5:8-14	Light of Christ	Jn 9:1-41	Man born blind
5	Ezek 37:12-14	The Exile	Rom 8:8-11	Jesus will give life	Jn 11:1-15	Lazarus

## For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. 3 *Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance, character, and character, hope.* 5 And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Rom 5:6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 (For rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person perhaps someone might possibly dare to die.) 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

At first glance, it might seem that the only link between Romans 5 and the other two readings is the word "poured", taking up the symbolism of water. There is, of course, much more. John's Gospel hints at the gift of the Spirit — picked up in Romans 5:5. At the same time, the reading talks of *access by grace to God*, the very topic of the Woman at the Well.

### KIND OF WRITING

The whole of Romans 5-8 parades before the Roman Christians the gifts of grace *in chronological order*, as follows:

Romans 5: faith, the Spirit, salvation

Romans 6: Baptism

Romans 7: the moral struggle

Romans 8: prayer (Abba, Father), the Holy Spirits in our hearts, unshakeable hope in Christ.

Our passage opens the discussion. In an almost imperceptible way, Rom 5:1-5 is an anticipation of all of Romans 5-8, displaying Paul's gift for synthesis. Vv. 6-8 begin the rich discussion of Jesus' death, which will be the main subject of the remaining verses of Romans 5 (see the discussion of vv. 12-19 in last week's notes).

### CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

In the Roman house churches, there was conflict between the Christ-believers of Gentile and Christian origin. Paul make

two attempts to break down feelings of separation and superiority. In Romans 1-4, he points out trenchantly there is no difference between the two groups when it comes to immorality. Both are alike equally "successful" in sinning. More constructively in Romans 5-8, he portrays the amazing gifts of grace *shared* by both groups without distinction. Such sheer giftedness, in all its unforeseeable magnificence, undermines — even mocks — any feeling of being superior on our own efforts.

### RELATED PASSAGES

Not only this, but we ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with endurance. (Romans 8:23–25)

And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness. (Romans 3:23–26)

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 1** Declared righteous means being put into "right relationship" simply by God's grace. Faith here means two things. It points to the believer's trust, on the model of Abraham in Romans 4. It also points to the faithfulness of Jesus, as explored in Romans 3:21-26. By Jesus'

act we have *peace*, that is salvation, with God.

**Verse 2** Key expressions for Paul are here: faith, grace, joy, hope and glory. This is Pauline shorthand for the grand narrative of salvation history, culminating in Christ. In vv. 1-2, salvation is threefold: past, present and future.

**Verses 3-4** Paul will take up the topic of our struggle to be faithful in Romans 7, one of the great passages in Paul.

**Verse 5** Here Paul looks forward to the great chapter 8 in Romans, where he will explore both the Holy Spirit and our unshakeable hope in Christ. Even more, for Paul these convictions are an experience of the *love* of God now, "poured into our hearts."

**Verse 6** Paul glances back at Romans 1:18-2:29, exploring our incapacity to act in accordance with conscience. He looks forward also to Romans 7: *Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:24) In Paul's teaching on salvation Jesus died for us, meaning *for our benefit* rather than *instead of* (as traditionally understood in atonement theology).

**Verse 7** Even though ancient Greek lacks brackets, the thought here is parenthetical. It is part of an overall "all the more so" approach fully exploited in vv. 12-19, as we saw last week.

**Verse 8** NB: Romans 3:21-26 (NET translation). Christ's death discloses God's faithfulness, love and forgiveness, all offered before we even heard of Jesus not to mention being converted in heart. We are freed from the fundamental human sin of not honouring God precisely as God. Cf. *So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Has the learning in vv. 3-4 been my experience?
2. God's breath-taking grace in Christ — when have I recently been aware of the gift, leading to thanksgiving?

### PRAYER

Always loving God, we standing before you, in awe-struck love and gratitude. While we were still sinners, you reached out to us in Christ and you still reach out to us today. Help us embrace your love, your forgiveness in Christ. Amen .

## Is the Lord with us, or not?

Exod 17:1 *From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.* 2 *The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"* 17:3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This short, perhaps disconcerting, reading is chosen for two reasons. First of all, it continues the story line from Adam to the Exile, with a brief profile of Moses. Secondly, it establishes the imagery of water, which is one of three key metaphors in the Gospel reading.

Apart from such formal considerations, the reading is rich in emotion and feeling. Who has not at times felt that an apparent improvement can feel—at least in the short term—less than satisfactory? There is a second account of this story in the book of Numbers (see below). In the Numbers version, this story has a tragic dénouement for Moses and Aaron: on account of their apparent disobedience / mistrust, neither will enter the promised land. Two opening verses have been included here.

### KIND OF WRITING

A brief dramatic incident, available in two traditions. The dominance of water is also a mark of Moses, who was "saved" by the Nile at birth, took people across the Red Sea and here produced water from the rock.

### ORIGIN OF THE READING

The book of Exodus has the following outline:

The Exodus: 1:1-15:21  
Towards Sinai: 15:22-18:27  
Sinai covenant: 19:1-24:11  
Decalogue / tabernacle: 24:12-31:18  
Golden calf incident: 32:1-34:35  
Tabernacle: 35:1-40:38

Our passage comes from the journey to Sinai.

### KIND OF WRITING

A brief dramatic incident, available in two traditions. The dominance of water is also a mark of Moses, who was "saved" by the Nile at birth, took people across the Red Sea and produced water from the rock.

### RELATED PASSAGES

So Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he had commanded him. Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarrelled with the Lord, and by which he showed his holiness. (Num 20:2-13)

Even though he struck the rock so that water gushed out and torrents overflowed, can he also give bread, or provide meat for his people?" (Psalm 78:20)

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water. (Psalm 114:7-8)

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 1** Rephidim is the last station before Sinai (Ex 19:2; Num 33:14-15).

**Verse 2** Testing God means demanding proof that God was really in charge of what was happening. Cf. v. 7; also: Exodus 8:18; Deuteronomy 7:21; 31:17;

Joshua 3:10. The two preceding incidents were also tests (15:25-26 and 16:4).

**Verse 3** cf. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:3)

**Verse 4** Not the only time!

**Verse 5** The elders function as witnesses here.

**Verse 6** Horeb is the other name for Sinai. Notice that in this J version God commands Moses to strike the rock (contrast the P version in Numbers). The Lord is present, somehow in a visible manner. Cf. The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21)

**Verse 7** Massah = Testing and Meribah = quarrelling. V.7 recalls v.2 above. The names eventually became symbolic of lack of trust as in Deuteronomy 6:16; 9:22; Ps 95:8.

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Sometimes after a decision has been taken and a new direction entered upon, we experience regret and doubt. What have I felt this way? Was it a healthy caution or something else?

2. Often as believers, we do wonder where is God is all this mess. This can be general (some incident or other) or quite personal, when a tragedy strikes or things simply turn very differently. Was I able to see God present after all in hindsight?

### PRAYER

God, all along the way, you are with us, even when we are not aware or even sure of your presence.

Help us to keep alive our trust in you, "with us always to the end of the age," so that our life's journey will not be alone or in vain.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, our rock, our spring of living water, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

# THE LITURGY

Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95 (94); Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

## THEMES ACROSS THE READINGS

The symbolism of water (lightly alluded to Romans with the phrase “poured into our hearts”) takes us across all three readings. In a very human way, the Old Testament reading voices regret and disappointment with the “liberation.” A great strength of the reading is that the people at least know that they are thirsty and are able to name their need.

The reading from Romans (why not restore the poetic missing verses 3 and 4?) constitutes a tremendous affirmation of all we have received in Christ. In particular, the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts—the evocation of the Spirit will be fully explored in Romans 8.

John 4 has many levels of meaning. Perhaps three hints may help. It is a story of *pre-evangelisation*, that is the awakening of an unrecognised spiritual thirst. It tells of the *pilgrimage* of faith in Christ, in ever-deepening stages (from being “a” Jew to the saviour of the world). It illustrates *mission*, as the woman drops her bucket and the real success of mission when the people believe *on their own account*.

## THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 95 (94), itself a response to the story here, is perfect. The response even looks forward to the woman at the well: *O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.*

## SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### First reading

*Exodus 17:3-7*

Following on the stories of Adam and Abraham, today we hear of Moses. Perhaps we can identify with the reaction of the Israelites: being set free doesn't always feel that way, at least initially.

### Second reading

*Romans 5:1-2, 5-8*

Paul is a great believer in the Holy Spirit, poured into the hearts of all believers, including ourselves. Because of this great gift, we can call the creator of all, Abba, father

### Gospel

*John 4:5-42*

Our Gospel today is long and very rich in meaning, using many images. Among the images: living (= flowing) water, marriage and the location of worship. Perhaps this year, one of the images or a line will speak to me today and the situation in which I find myself?

## WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### Monday 16 March

*2 Kings 5:1-15*

A very lively, realistic story prepares us for the Gospel reading. There are comic elements: the disappointment of Naaman and the utterly sensible advice of his servants.

*Luke 4:24-30*

Our reading is really the second part of an integrated scene in Luke's Gospel. Jesus preaches in Nazareth and is initially well received. What we really have here is a symbolic *tableau*, giving us the whole Gospel story of Jesus in a nutshell. The last elusive line points to Easter.

### Tuesday 17 March

*St Patrick, bishop and missionary*

*Sirach 39:6-10*

Our reading describes the truly wise person and invites us to notice the wisdom of Patrick and his world-wide renown.

*2 Timothy 4:1-8*

This reading, looking back on the ministry of Paul, invites us to reflect on the astonishing achievements of St Patrick.

*Matthew 13:24-32*

Of the two parables, perhaps the second one is more adapted to the feast: the kingdom of heaven is compared to the smallest of seeds — a hope that sustained Patrick as he evangelised Ireland.

### Wednesday 18 March

*St Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop and doctor*

*Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9*

Our reading reflects on God's grace to Israel and on the consequent responsibility of the Israelites to live lives consistent

with that grace. It was true long ago in Judaism; it is true today in our Christian proclamation.

*Matthew 5:17-19*

Matthew can disconcert with his quite conservative attitudes. It is important to remember that the Law (the Torah) meant three things at the time: the Pentateuch, the moral law and the ritual. The moral law is, if anything, sharpened.

### Thursday 19 March

*St Joseph, husband of the BVM*

*2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16*

God's fidelity *through time* is expressed in his commitment to the family of David, of which Jesus will be born.

*Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22*

Abraham trusted against all the odds — as did his later descendant Joseph.

*Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24*

Joseph of the Gospels reminds us of Joseph of Genesis, who dreamed and who saved his family.

### Friday 20 March

*Hosea 14:2-10*

Hosea wrote in the 8th century BC, at a time of immense pressure from Assyria. He can be trenchant but is also a marvellous poet of the love of God. Listen by letting any of the moving metaphors touch our hearts.

*Mark 12:28-34*

This great passages takes us to the heart of the preaching of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

### Saturday 21 March

*Hosea 5:15-6:6*

This is really a sarcastic reading. But, behind the biting sarcasm, is the beating heart of God, reaching out to us again and again.

*Luke 18:9-14*

The risk for us in reading this parable is that we find ourselves sitting in judgment on the Pharisee—that is, copying him in sitting in judgment on the tax collector. The heart-felt prayer for mercy is at the centre: can I make it my own?