

5th Sunday of Pascha – The Samaritan Women
(John 4: 5-42) – see attachment

A number of times now I have expressed, in my homilies, my interest and fascination with 'words;' their origins and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history. This interest in words is by no means limited to the English language. I love the way the Chinese language uses pictograms in the construction of written words. Take for example the word below 'Boat'.



The word boat comprises three words: vessel, person, and eight. Why eight you might ask!? Just look at what we read in Genesis 6:18, God says to Noah, "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you" - That is Eight persons!

The Chinese word for 'To Listen' is also, I think, wonderful



Before looking at this word I would like to turn to our gospel reading for this, the 5th Sunday of Pascha. The Sundays that now lead us to the Feast of Pentecost all have a common purpose; this is to increase our thirst for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We read in John 4: 5-42 how Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman (Photini) at a well and says to her, "Give Me a drink." (v7). Thus begins St Photini's conversation with Jesus, the longest recorded in the New Testament. As Jesus talks with St Photini the disciples return from buying food (v8) and look on in dismay as Jesus talks, not just to a 'Woman' but a 'Samaritan' Woman (v27).

I think it significant that icons, like the one below, show the 12 (male) disciples looking on in dismay as Jesus stands alone, with St Photini, in broad daylight engaged in theological discussion. Jesus disregards the prevailing social mores with respect, not only with respect to interaction with women but also those perceived to be outsiders.

Why did Jesus engage with St Photini in this way?

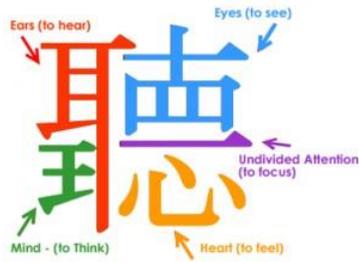
Why did he spend so much time talking with her?

What is so special about her?

I think the answer to these questions are very simple; St Photini listened and was honest!

The Lord knew about her lifestyle, "He told me all that I ever did." (v39). However, He did not condemn, judge, or ignore, and perhaps because she appreciated His respect and genuine concern, she acknowledged to Him the truth about her life. Quite possibly, she had never encountered a man who treated her in this way before as a beloved child of God, and so, she listened, and I don't just mean she used her ears!

This brings me back to the Chinese pictogram 'To Listen'. This verb comprised of 5 words.



Yes, St Photini used her **ears** to listen to Jesus, but she also listened with **undivided attention**, she used her **mind** to give careful consideration to what was being discussed, and, perhaps most importantly, she opened her **heart** to receive our Lords words.

It is because St Photini truly listened that she truly heard. It is because she truly heard that her **eyes** where opened, by our Lord, and she was able to receive and be healed, to drink of the *“fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”* (V14)

In light of her history, St Photini would at first seem to be an unlikely candidate for holiness. However, this ‘outsider’,

- recognised Jesus as ‘*the Christ, the Saviour of the world;*’ (v42);
- was one of the first believers in Jesus and provides us with a sign of how one’s faith in Christ can develop; became one of the people who best exemplifies apostleship;
- was one of His first preachers.
- Further, the people of her town -- including men -- also came to believe (v28). This is noteworthy given that in her time, women were not accepted as credible witnesses.

All of this was made possible because St Photini LISTENED.

May I, as we continue to prepare for the Feast of Pentecost, encourage you to listen!

As we pray, as we read the scriptures, as we worship and fellowship together, let us endeavour to do so with undivided attention, with attentive ears, with watchful eyes, with clarity of thought and with a loving heart; And like St Photini may we thirst for the ‘living water’ (v11) and ask of our Lord, *“Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst”* (v13).

