

Written Copy: Exodus 17:4-6 “Living Water from The Rock”

3rd Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 12th, 2023

Text: Exodus 17:4-6

⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

The text’s intent

Show how God’s people handle adversity and affliction that He allows to come into their life wrongly by doubting His stated love, care, and past work to redeem and save them from their enemies and previous adversity and attacking Him as being uncaring and not present as He promised. But we see the LORD being gracious and merciful, ever present and wanting His troubled people to trust in Him for all needs of body and soul. He comes to be with them. And through Moses striking the rock He shows them He is present as the Mighty Creator God who can give water even from the most unlikely places. He provides not just water for the body, but the water of faith for the soul moving them to trust in Him alone, who gives to them not as they earn or deserve, but according to His steadfast love and faithfulness.

Focus Statement:

The LORD called sinful Israel to be His chosen people even though they were undeserving. The LORD was with them truly present yet hidden at the rock of Horeb to provide them not just water for their bodies, but the water of faith for their souls to trust in His love, presence, and provision. Christ came to the lady at the well to provide for her the water of life: all that He won for us in His life, death, and resurrection. Despite our sin and doubt He declares us to be not guilty because in His gracious gift He has paid for all our offenses. Through that water of life He pours into our hearts in baptism we have peace with God now and throughout our lives unto resurrection day.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We have our thirsty times of affliction and trouble where we doubt the LORD’s care, compassion and presence. We can see Him as punishing us, or abandoning us, or not strong or able enough to help us. We can be tempted to look to other means first rather than turn to Him.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See these times of thirsty affliction when it seems like God is not present as His Spirit working to produce endurance, Christian character, and a hope that lasts throughout our time in this parched sinful wilderness unto life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: Jesus gives water of life from the Rock of Faith

Introduction: When There Appears to be No Water

In the 1800's during the westward expansion of our country many a traveler passed over setting down roots in what we now called Nebraska, choosing instead to continue on westward. This was not because they thought the soil was not good for farming. It was and still is. The land has a rich black soil that would be great for growing wheat and corn. The trouble is, as these travelers looked around, they didn't see water anywhere. Good soil, without water to make the crops grow is good for nothing was their thinking. One writer at the time even called it "The Great American Desert". Some died crossing that state for lack of water. Yet today Nebraska is called the "Breadbasket of our Nation". What changed since those early days of expansion? Could it be there was water there that those early settlers couldn't see?

Our God promises to provide for those who believe in Him. And if we take to heart those words from our Responsive Psalm about who our God is and what He is capable of we should never doubt His ability to provide for us. **Psalm 95:3-5. ³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.** All of the earth rests in His hands: the farthest depths-deeper than any man can dig down, to the highest mountains, and all that lays in between those two extremes. And when it comes to the seas and the oceans, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration "More than eighty percent of our ocean is unmapped, unobserved, and unexplored." Yet our Lord knows every inch of it.

He is a mighty God, far greater than any other person or force anywhere in the universe. And who are we to this mighty God? **Psalm 95:7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.** He is the Mighty God who is our shepherd, promising to care for us as a shepherd cares for and provides for His helpless sheep. Except often in life things happen that cause us to question that care, question His ability to provide, and even His desire to do so. Things like personal tragedies that affect us and our loved ones, sickness, cancer, hospitalization, loss of job or income. Those times when we turn to the LORD in prayer and ask for Him to come and help us, relieve the burden of affliction that has settled on us or our loved one, only to have it seem like He doesn't hear, doesn't answer. Such is the case for the Israelites in our Old Testament Lesson

Israel Quarrels With Moses and God Over Water

In our Old Testament Lesson Israel is on the way from the Red Sea, where the LORD had finally defeated their slave masters in Egypt. They are headed toward the land that the LORD had promised their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Before they get there He is leading them to Mount Sinai where He will call them into a Covenant relationship where He declares Himself to be their shepherding God and they are to live and worship Him alone as His people, the sheep of His pasture.

Now when your shepherd is the mighty LORD God you might expect the trip to be problem free, but it has been far from that. First there was the place they camped at where the only water available was too bitter and undrinkable. So they grumbled at Moses for leading

them there, even though it was the LORD leading them through Moses. Moses prayed to the LORD who showed him a log to throw into the spring, and through this simple means the LORD does the miraculous work of making the water drinkable.

They move on from there and the next problem that occurs is lack of food. They are in the wilderness and there are no McDonalds, or Burger Kings, or even Domino's Pizza deliveries. There is no food except their livestock. And if they begin eating that there will be no source for wool and milk. They once again grumble and complain to Moses that he has led them out into this 'god-forsaken' wilderness to die of starvation when they should've just stayed in Egypt where they sat around eating pots full of meat. (It seems they had already forgotten the part about them being slaves for whom the slave masters didn't even provide the needed straw for bricks and made them work their fingers to the bone, let alone pots of meat). And in forgetting this they are forgetting to be grateful and thankful for the miraculous saving work of the LORD in rescuing them from that living hell. Moses warns them that their grumbling and complaining to him and about him is actually grumbling, complaining, doubting, and sinning against the LORD God Himself.

The LORD answers the peoples grumbling and complaining not with the punishment they deserved, not by abandoning them, or sending them back to slavery in Egypt. Instead, He miraculously provides bread from heaven to eat, which the children of Israel call manna. It appears as the LORD's special blessing every morning, 6 days a week, with extra on the 6th day so that they can enjoy a Sabbath rest on the 7th day, just as God rested from His work of Creation at the beginning. He not only provides this once, but continues to provide it throughout their 40 years of wilderness wanderings. He shows Himself to be the gracious, merciful, and forgiving God who hears the cry of His sheep and responds with love and care.

Then, just before they get to Mount Sinai, they camp at the place described in our Old Testament Lesson: Rephidim. Here the problem is greater than bitter water; it's no water at all. Wandering in the Wilderness around Mt. Sinai can make a people very thirsty. And whatever water they had taken with them from the last camp has been used up. And what do they do? How do they respond? Not by remembering all of the gracious acts the LORD had already done for them. But as before, they respond with grumbling and complaining to Moses. Except this time their anger has increased. **Exodus 17:2-3** ² **Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"** ³ **But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"** The grumbling and complaining has turned into quarreling, they want to pick a fight with Moses. They are angry enough that they are talking about stoning him.

Sinful Man's Unrealistic Expectations

In their anger they accuse Moses of purposefully leading them and their livestock out into this wilderness to die of thirst. They are saying to Moses "Didn't you know that there would

be a water problem? Didn't you plan for this? You don't care about us at all. We never should've listened to you. We never should've left Egypt." But as Moses pointed out before, their grumbling, quarreling, threatening is not really aimed at him. He is the LORD's chosen leader, shepherd, and mediator on their behalf. To grumble, quarrel and threaten Moses is to do those very same things against the LORD Himself who has thus far cared for them as a Shepherd cares for His sheep. Instead, they've forgotten His love and care. Instead, their attitude is "What have you done for me lately?"

Now granted this is the All Mighty and All-powerful God with whom the highest heights and deepest oceans rest in His hands; the One for whom no problem is too big for Him to solve. He knew before they left Egypt that they would run into the undrinkable water problem, the lack of food problem, and now the lack of water. It was no surprise to the LORD. The Israelites expected their trip to be like a modern-day cruise ship, where all their needs and wants are provided for. And the LORD certainly had it within His power to provide that. But notice their attitude now after He had already miraculously provided for them. Would it have been any better, any more faithful, if they never experienced any discomfort or affliction?

And what did they deserve? They didn't deserve to be redeemed out of slavery in Egypt, or saved at the Red Sea, or any of the gracious works the LORD had accomplished for them since. Because of their sinful doubting and complaining and dissatisfaction with the gracious gifts of the LORD they deserved to be abandoned and left for dead.

It's easy for us to see the ungratefulness in their lives. But how easy is it for us to see that in our own? Don't we sometimes expect our life to be free from problems, afflictions, troubles, shortfalls, and needs? Our life itself is a gracious gift from the Heavenly Father, and it's because of our sin, and the sin that fills this world that our life in these bodies is filled with suffering that will eventually end in death. Yet we blame God for what happens, feeling we have the right to judge what our life should be like and how long it should last. We grumble and complain when the LORD seemingly doesn't provide or come to our aid, at least in the way and timing we think He should. Like the Israelites, we deserve abandonment just as they did. We deserve to fall back into slavery to sin, death, and the devil. But thank God that's not what we receive!

Our Gracious God Who Provides Living Water From The Rock

Instead of abandoning the Israelites for dead, or sending them away from His presence forever, the LORD comes to them yet again to provide for them. He tells Moses in **Exodus 17:6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.** The LORD God Himself comes and is present to save His people from dying of thirst. He does so in a miraculous way, one that no one would've ever expected. He makes water come from a rock of all places. And He does it in a way that the elders can witness to the rest of the people that the Almighty LORD God is truly present, caring for and providing for His people as only He could. He does it in a way that shows that Moses is His chosen and trusted servant, leader and mediator for them, His gracious gift to them who they need to listen to and follow. He allows all this to happen so that the people might see and believe in the LORD as their God who has saved them in the past and will continue to do so. And save them not just from physical discomfort and death; He has come to save them in a much greater way.

In our Gospel Lesson we see Jesus coming to a Samaritan woman who needs something greater than simple water to drink. She's caught up in a sinful lifestyle that she cannot extract herself from, separated from her Creator God, and headed for eternal death. Yet the Father sends His Son to her with a gracious gift. At first she doesn't want anything to do with Him, since He is a Jew and she a Samaritan Woman. But that doesn't faze Jesus. He loves all people, even her, even you and I when we try to turn away from Him.

He comes to her to give her what she could never draw out herself no matter how many wells or how many streams she visited. **John 4:13-14** ¹³ **Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** Even better than water from a rock, even more miraculous is this gift, this spring of water that brings eternal life. For this “water” is a word picture for Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit.

He comes from a place people might least expect Him, from Words in a Book written long ago, from those Words united with the water of Holy Baptism, making that water a true spring welling up to eternal life. Because the Holy Spirit pours into your heart and life all the gracious gifts that Jesus came to provide you with. The Apostle Paul describes these gifts in **Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** It's the work of “justification”: which means we stand before God with no charges of sin held against us. Not because we didn't commit them; we certainly have in all those times we complained about the troubles and afflictions that come upon us. However, because of the work of faith the Spirit does in your heart, you are declared to be innocent. Jesus has taken care of, removed, washed away all that would condemn you to eternal separation from our Creator God. He took them to the cross and died to removed them from your record forever. And His resurrection proves your account with God has been settled: paid in full.

With no sin charged against you, because of all Jesus has done on your behalf, you have peace with God, now and into eternity. This peace means that as you wander through the wilderness of the sinful world you have a wonderful destination ahead, one even greater than the Israelites. It's the Promised Land of eternal life. And it will be free from all the afflictions that troubled the Israelites as well as us today.

And the presence of that Living Water, the Holy Spirit in your life means that when troubles do come its not because the LORD your shepherd has abandoned you. The Apostle Paul in **Romans 5:3-5** tells us that because of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit ³ **...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** The LORD allows these things to build up our character as His children. The ever-present Holy Spirit working through the means of grace: His Word, the ongoing repentance He generates through it, and the grace we receive this day through the Sacrament. He provides the life giving water of faith we need to endure all that we must face today and tomorrow. And through all this He wants us to remember that this world is not our home, it's not our goal. We are on our way to the Promised Land, the restored perfection of the original Garden of Eden, the gracious gift that will be ours forever.

Conclusion

How can it be that Nebraska, once known as the "Great American Desert" is now called the "Breadbasket of America"? Because hidden beneath the ground, unseen to the naked eye, is a huge underground lake and aquifer that covers 2/3's of the state. All that had to be done was to dig down and tap into this resource that is all the water needed to make it that rich soil perfect for supplying our country with grain.

You and I have a hidden aquifer that is the Holy Spirit given in baptism. He brings into your life all that Jesus Christ has done to make you right with God and at peace with Him now and eternally. Troubles, affliction, sickness, loss and death will come in this fallen world. But never think as the Israelites did that God has brought you this far only to abandon you. He was with them just as He is with you now. His Spirit is within your heart as the hidden yet powerful water of life. He is with you to continue His work, just as He once brought water from a rock for His children of old. He is at work even now bringing you help and comfort from the unlikeliest places and through everyday ordinary means. He doesn't always prevent struggles from happening, but He is always with you to walk with you through them. And His goal is not to bring you heaven on earth, but to keep you in a steadfast faith relationship with Him, where you keep calling on Him as the Rock who brings to you the water of life now and all the way into eternity. Amen