

The Propers and Fr. Andy's Sermon for: Year A, Third Sunday in Lent

The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Exodus 17:1-7

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. The people quarreled 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?" 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?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 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. 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. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Psalm 95

Venite, exultemus

- 1 Come, let us sing to the LORD; *
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving *
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
- 3 For the LORD is a great God, *
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, *
and the heights of the hills are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it, *
and his hands have molded the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, *
and kneel before the LORD our Maker.
- 7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. *
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!
- 8 Harden not your hearts,
as your forebears did in the wilderness, *
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah,
when they tempted me.
- 9 They put me to the test, *
though they had seen my works.

10 Forty years long I detested that generation and said, *
"This people are wayward in their hearts;
they do not know my ways."
11 So I swore in my wrath, *
"They shall not enter into my rest."

Romans 5:1-11

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called

Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Preached at St. Luke’s: 03/12/23

“Is the LORD among us, or not?” That’s basically the question we’re left with after today’s reading from Exodus. And at first glance, I think we need to empathize with the Israelites. After all, they’re wandering without water in the desert, because that’s where God has led them. Who wouldn’t question God’s purpose, or even His presence at such a time and place? But then, on the other hand, we needn’t page back very far in this particular book - specifically dedicated, mind you, to showing how God both delivered and provided for His people - in order to get a larger perspective and context for today’s reading. And so, if we turn back only one chapter from this story of God’s people complaining about their thirst, we’ll find them complaining about their hunger; grumbling that they would have done better to eat their fill and die in Egypt, than to follow the One who delivered them from the chains of slavery in that country. So, in the presence of this ingratitude for what He has already done,

what comes next? What does God do? How does He answer this grumbling for food? Does He force them to fend for themselves? Does He allow them to starve? No, quite the opposite! He sends them bread from heaven. He sends them manna; a food so perfect, so supernatural that it provided the Israelites with everything that was necessary for survival. A bread so divine, that it's thought to have produced no waste – think about that, 40 years is a long time between bowel movements. Manna: the original Super-Food. But move over Jell-o, because even after God's chosen people have had their fill of the Bread of Angels, Lord knows there's always room for more grumbling. So next, come the quail. Not because they needed the meat – the Manna already provided them all that was necessary to survive. He provides them with quail not because they were in need, but because He is gracious. And so, if we want to understand today's reading from Exodus, we need to understand it in this context. In the context of a people whose every need has been provided for, whose every desire has been taken into account at every step they've begrudgingly taken out of captivity. It is in this context, that God's people now stand before Him and grumble about their thirst. Not dehydration- they're not actually dying of thirst as the claim; because, again, the bread from heaven provided them with all that was necessary for their survival. They don't need water. Therefore, their complaint is about discomfort – they're thirsty, and demanding their thirst be quenched. And so, once again, not only are their needs provided for, but their desires are also given consideration, and they receive water from a rock. And once this miraculous water has been given, what are we left with? That question... "Is the Lord among us, or not?" Completely understandable, right? Because obviously, the jury's still out on that one.

So, the whole scene we have of God's people from today's reading of Exodus is, if we can be honest, a little disappointing. But wait, there's more! Why settle for a little disappointing, when we can be completely disappointed in God's people? And all we have to do is be completely honest, by remembering that we - you and I - are God's people; and by realizing this scene from Exodus might as well be that one awkward and embarrassing home movie which makes us truly thankful that no one actually owns a VCR anymore. This isn't a matter of "them, over there" it's a matter of "us, right here." And once we come to that realization, then it becomes literally impossible to "empathize" with "God's people," because we actually have another term for that - it's called self-pity. None of us would be foolish enough to come to God in prayer, with nothing more than the rhetorical question "What have you done for me lately?" And yet, like the Israelites, most of us live a good portion of our lives in accordance with that exact sentiment. Taking for granted the countless blessings that God has already bestowed upon us, while indignantly crying, "Hey, a little help, here?" I know I do, and there's really no reason to pretend otherwise; no matter how distasteful I find that admission. But do you know what I find even harder to stomach than our ingratitude? The utter lack of faith which feeds it. A simple lack of faith in the one universal truth that we can say with the utmost surety. The one thing that we can say we absolutely, positively know about the nature of our Lord... is that He is gracious! Yes, our Lord is, above all else, is gracious. So, what bothers me most about this reading is not that God's people are complaining about what we do and do not have, but that we lack the basic faith to know that we will be provided for. As God rightly reminds the Psalmist, we do not know His ways. Which means we do not know His grace. Like the child at the dinner table

with the only empty glass, we exclaim with disgust, “Why don't I get any milk!?” fully believing in our tiny hearts that we must suffer without. When all that God is asking of us, is that we simply ask Him, “May I have something to drink?”, trusting that we will receive whatever we need; whether that’s milk, water, or – sometimes - nothing. Not because we are worthy of receiving what we need, but because we are loved, and He is gracious. But instead, like the Israelites at the end of our first reading, we wonder, “Is the Lord among us, or not?”

A question which stands in stark contrast to the final thought from today's Gospel, “...we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” A jarring statement which comes not from God's chosen people. Not from the mouths of those whose every need was provided for, whose cry of hunger was answered with bread from heaven, whose very thirst was quenched by water from a rock, even as God personally led them through the wilderness. Instead, it comes to us from the lips of the Samaritans, the people with whom God's people “do not share things in common.” In a word, the “unclean.” Those, whom according to the people of God, have no reason to expect a single blessing from the LORD God of Israel, are the ones who very clearly recognize what God’s people have failed to see. So, if we’re hoping for an example of the faith that might set us on a different path, we’ll need turn our gaze away from ourselves, toward those thought to be outside of God’s grace. Amongst those who cannot expect a Jew to converse with them, let alone stay with them. It is with the woman who has had five husbands and is now “living in sin,” that we can glimpse our hope; the one who dares to ask the living God for the living water, with no possible reason to expect it. It is she, who must be our example. She is the one who begins the process of evangelizing the Samaritans and, if we’re smart, us. And she

makes her beginning - and ours - if we choose - with a simple act that is easily overlooked, or worse: chalked-up to mere excitement, or confusion, or forgetfulness. Because what was she doing at the well in the first place? She came to draw water, of course. And why did she come to draw water from the well? Because unlike the grumblers in the wilderness, if she doesn't get water she will die. And does she get her water? No, she doesn't. In fact, not only does she go home without her water, she goes home without her water jar – which is to say, she runs off, leaving behind the very means by which she obtains this most basic necessity of life. She cannot count on water springing forth from a rock, like some elect ingrate. No, she must go and get enough of it to get through the day. Day after day, she has to carry it from the well to her home, and during the hottest part of that day, no less. Therefore, it's by this simple, and what I would call "deliberate act," of leaving her jar at the well, that she is witnessing to a faith that she will be provided for. Her only purpose for being at the well is instantly cast aside by her budding faith - by a tangible, if tiny, belief that her very real needs will be met, in spite of her very real sins. And it's because of her words and action that these Samaritans invite the Messiah, not only into their homes, but into their lives; and because God is gracious, He accepts the invitation. Not because they are worthy, but because He is God. Through this invitation, these outsiders begin to understand that truth which God is continually spoon-feeding His chosen people, even as we constantly and unceremoniously continue to spit it up all over ourselves and Him, again and again. That yes, our gracious LORD is among us!

So, in a matter of minutes, when we're called, once again, to the fullness of the Lord's table; will we come to our food and drink, that true Bread of Heaven and Cup of

Salvation, unsatisfied, and unfaithful? Will we approach the spiritual sustenance given for our redemption – body and soul – demanding, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” Or, will we come with a quiet assurance; that despite all our shortcomings and amid all the chaos which surrounds us... all that is necessary will be provided, because God is gracious? Faithfully insisting, instead, “...we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.