

### 3.12.23 – Lent 3

#### “Water as a Symbol for Life”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Exodus 17:1-7 (NLT)**

*Water from the Rock*

<sup>1</sup> At the Lord’s command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin (*related to Sinai*) and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> So once more the people complained against Moses. “Give us water to drink!” they demanded. “Quiet!” Moses replied. “Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord?”

<sup>3</sup> But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?”

<sup>4</sup> Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!”

<sup>5</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. <sup>6</sup> I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai (*also called Horeb*). Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink.” So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on.

<sup>7</sup> Moses named the place Massah (which means “test”) and Meribah (which means “arguing”) because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord here with us or not?”

**Leader: These are Words of God for a Rebellious People.** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **John 4:25-42 (GNT)**

<sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.”

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, “I am he, I who am talking with you.”

<sup>27</sup> At that moment Jesus’ disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, “What do you want?” or asked him, “Why are you talking with her?”

<sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, <sup>29</sup> “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?” <sup>30</sup> So they left the town and went to Jesus.

<sup>31</sup> In the meantime the disciples were begging Jesus, “Teacher, have something to eat!”

<sup>32</sup> But he answered, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

<sup>33</sup> So the disciples started asking among themselves, “Could somebody have brought him food?”

<sup>34</sup> “My food,” Jesus said to them, “is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do. <sup>35</sup> You have a saying, ‘Four more months and then

the harvest.’ But I tell you, take a good look at the fields; the crops are now ripe and ready to be harvested! <sup>36</sup> The one who reaps the harvest is being paid and gathers the crops for eternal life; so the one who plants and the one who reaps will be glad together. <sup>37</sup> For the saying is true, ‘Someone plants, someone else reaps.’ <sup>38</sup> I have sent you to reap a harvest in a field where you did not work; others worked there, and you profit from their work.”

<sup>39</sup> Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I have ever done.” <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there two days.

<sup>41</sup> Many more believed because of his message, <sup>42</sup> and they told the woman, “We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Savior of the world.”

**Leader: These Words of Jesus Are Living Water.** All: Thanks be to God!

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Jesus, thank you for the words of Scripture to remind us that God provided living water through you. Help us to apply them to our daily lives, especially during this season of Lent. May we remember your teachings as we walk your steps to the cross. Let us experience the quenching of thirst and the fulfillment of spiritual hunger as we draw closer to you this season. Be present with those who could not be here, as you speak through me this morning. Amen.

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Good for all of us who remembered to turn our clocks forward! I hope you’ll get a “holy” nap this afternoon, since we lost an hour of sleep. For many, the extra hours of daylight in the evening will be refreshing and productive, but we’ll have to see if Congress approves the Senate bill from March of last year, creating a permanent change. Let’s move on to our lesson.

This chapter in Exodus comes after God provided manna for the Israelites to eat as they followed Moses out of Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula into the desert wilderness on their way to the promised land of Canaan. It was a long and arduous journey as you can read starting in Chapter 12. The people murmured and rebelled, yet time and again, God provided for them. While camped at Rephidim, the thirsty people complained and planned to stone Moses for their condition of extreme

thirst. Moses told them not to test the Lord but to recall his provision of food in the form of manna. God was still patient with them and instructed Moses to strike a rock at Horeb (the Sinai region) with the same staff he had used in the presence of Pharaoh to strike the Nile River undrinkable and the same staff he used to part the Red Sea. This staff of God symbolized God's strength and power while reminding the people to trust in God.

Moses demonstrated both his faith and his trust that God would provide water for his people. The people were on the move only with what they could carry, so the wilderness became not just a place, but a state of mind. Yes, they had left willingly and were being led by God through Moses, yet they couldn't perceive the end goal. Some were so afraid of their circumstances (Ex 14:10-13) that they wanted to return to the dangers they knew in Egypt rather than die in the stark unknown wilderness. Doesn't that sound like our thinking sometimes?

God was testing the Israelites, and it was his choice, but it was not good for the people to test God. They still could not understand, so God produced another demonstration of his power, mercy, and even love by bringing water out of a rock. Obedience to God's law was important for their sustenance and to respect God's creative powers of life itself. Water within the rock was not visible to the eyes, yet it was present through God's gift of the natural world. Have you ever seen a spring of water pouring out of rock? We saw several in Israel, particularly in the various excavated tunnels covered up by land above now, but where Jesus had walked 2,000 years ago. God's ability to expose this unseen water was the first hint at an eternal life they could not see or understand. Nothing

could grow in the desert without water, so the revelation of Moses bringing water out of rock into the desert was profound.

It is the same with our spiritual connection to God; Bobby Joe told me he met an insurance lady who spoke to a recently returned space station crew member. He was moved by the view of the earth as a tiny blue marble of mostly water but connected land masses with connected populations of numerous countries, but no boundaries from space. That gave him hope for the world that despite our differences, we are all connected by our humanity and the waters of the earth. When the crew member returned home and saw the news around the world, he could barely recall that marble of connection; all he saw was disconnectedness, ego, arrogance, war, hate, violence, and isolationism. It was a *Kairos* moment I can imagine. Jesus is, for us today and has been always, the connection to God and to his people, no matter the language, culture, or location. There are very few plants that can grow in the desert without some water; a relationship with God could not have been sustained for Israel without this symbolic gesture of water to sustain life.

In John's fourth chapter, the first 24 verses told how Jesus had revealed his divinity to the Samaritan woman at the well. You know that story, or please go back to review it. Samaria was also a desert climate, so Jacob's well was crucial to existence, but would only quench human thirst. The water Jesus gives, "living water" provides continuous life. He knew all about this woman's husbands and about the Samaritan people's false worship and beliefs, yet he did not judge her or them. He only told the truth. That truth confronted her past as she wondered if he might be the Messiah for whom they had hoped, prayed, and waited. Her

repentance and willingness to testify to the food and water Jesus gave her assured her of eternal life. She was so impacted by Jesus' recognition of her that she forgot her water jar and ran off to tell others, knowing that living water though unseen and not collected physically in her bucket was her reward. The real lesson of this illumination was for the disciples and the Samaritans (who culturally never spoke or interacted with Jews). The woman was converted on the spot, but the others needed more convincing. Some of the Samaritans did meet Jesus, and their hearts were opened to God in a new way, with water as a symbol for life.

Don't we (with our skeptical brains and logic) need to be reminded from time to time of the supernatural living water that Jesus provides? As we journey through Lent, it is our duty to seek this living water that is not visible in the rock (or in our everyday busyness), but to seek living water in relationship with God through Christ. The connectedness with each other and with God through Scripture, prayer, and service is what assures us of eternal life. That living water is now and can be found all around us; we do not have to wait for heaven to experience a demonstration like Moses performed or to have a conversation with the woman at the well. Are we looking for these types of living water demonstrations as we go through our daily activities? Acts of kindness, mercy, generosity, and love show the eternal life Jesus gives and gave on the cross for us. Look for *Kairos* moments, the goosebumps of a seeming coincidence. Nicodemus had trouble understanding what he could not see in the natural realm, but being born again means trusting and obeying God and surrendering to the grace of Christ's sacrifice. Will you repent; will you look for those points of connection to God and with each other? That is

our Lenten practice that will mature and transform us while bringing eternal life here on earth. Amen. //

**Will you pray with me?** Creator God, you are awesome, and we cannot fathom your grace or love, yet we hope and pray for it. Help us to draw nearer to you in all our plans and divine experiments. We know you are present here in our church, mission center, and community. Help us to see opportunities to share your living water with others. In Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**