

Exodus 17:1-7  
John 4:1-15

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
March 12, 2023

## **“Fill My Cup, Lord”**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

Our passage today from the book of Exodus is one of several so-called “murmuring stories” in Exodus and Numbers in connection with the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel between the time that they left Egypt and the time they entered the promised land of Canaan. Listen to these words from Exodus 17:1-7 . . .

### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

Our Gospel Lesson for this Third Sunday of Lent presents a conversation between Jesus and a woman of Samaria at a well near Sychar. It is the longest recorded conversation in the New Testament between Jesus and anyone. Both are thirsty, but Jesus offers a living water. Listen to these words from John 4:1-15 . . .

### *Sermon*

Sometimes we take water for granted. Then comes a summer drought and the grass turns brown, the lake levels go down, and we realize how precious it is. No doubt all of us can recall a time when we were very thirsty. And thankfully, we did find water to drink. What did we do before we had cup holders in our cars?

If we look on the bright side of getting older, we can see a number of advantages. For example, most of us have gained wisdom through many different experiences of life; many have more free time to spend with grandchildren or traveling or volunteering in a community service role. But one thing that gives us pause is the thought of losing our memories and faculties.

Many of us, including myself, have known those “senior moments,” when we just draw a blank on what could otherwise be easily named. And some enter a more serious condition whereby our memory capacity is significantly impaired.

Well, the people of Israel that we read about in our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 17 had another memory problem—what we might call spiritual amnesia. They forgot how God had cared for them in the past: leading them out of bondage in Egypt, guiding them in a pillar of cloud by day and a fire by night, enabling their escape through the waters of the sea, providing quail and manna in the wilderness.

But here they are camped at a desert location called Rephidim, and there was no water.

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?” (vv. 2-3)

At the end of the story Moses calls the place Mas’sah and Mer’i bah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Testing is “putting God to the proof,” coercing God to act. Like when we pray, “Lord, if you will just get me out of this awful predicament, I will go to church every Sunday and give a tenth of everything I have.” It is an attempt to turn faith into sight.

Recall Satan’s second temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, following his baptism:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:5-7)

So Jesus quotes from this wilderness tradition with the understanding that such a leap would be trying to force the hand of God.

Our lesson tells us that the people complained and quarreled and tested the Lord. But it never indicates that the people prayed. The apostle Paul told the members of the church in Philippi:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Some problems can be solved by careful thought and planning, by rearranging our priorities. Some can be solved by discussion and wise counsel. But some problems can only be solved by prayer. Rather than complaining and quarreling, we need to pray. Prayer can calm our thoughts and emotions. It can clear our minds and open our ears to God's guidance. The famous British poet Alfred Tennyson rightly said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

Now this was not the first, nor the last, time that the people of Israel had grumbled against Moses. Listen to chapter 16, verses 2 and 3:

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 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."

Looks like it's not just preachers who complain about their people; it's also people who complain about their preachers. Some, it is said, enjoy roast preacher for Sunday dinner

When the going got really tough, the people of Israel were ready to give up their freedom and go back into slavery in Egypt. At least there they could count on something to eat and something to drink. Just so, there are many people today who are ready to give up their freedom

for security. Give up their freedom to a government that will give them something to eat and something to drink.

Well, at this point Moses cries out to the Lord, “What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” (v.4) God tells Moses not to bear this burden alone, that the burden of leadership is to be shared with others. And with some of the elders as witnesses, Moses is instructed to take his trusty staff and with God, not absent, but standing before him, he is to strike the rock at Horeb, and water will come forth. And thus does God provide for his thirsty people. The wilderness seemed like a godforsaken place, but it was not.

Are you currently going through a wilderness situation in your life? It may seem like it is void of God’s presence and care. Be assured, it is not. Recall this Exodus story of God’s care for his thirsty people and take heart. Trust that even as “his eye is on the sparrow, he watches over me.” A congregation may feel that it’s just clinging to life, doing what it can to minister to a declining membership of mostly elderly people. Facing budget struggles. That congregation should *know* that God has not forgotten or forsaken it.

In our Gospel lesson from the fourth chapter of John we meet a thirsty woman. Here a Samaritan woman has come at noon to a well to draw water. It was Joseph’s well, famous for centuries as the place where the patriarch Jacob had found water. It was on part of the land that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jesus was there, tired and thirsty from his journey from Judea to Galilee.

Well, at noon a woman approaches the well to draw water. The custom was that twice a day, morning and evening, women came to draw water. This woman came at noon, probably to avoid meeting people who knew of her reputation.

Having nothing to draw with himself, Jesus asks the woman to draw him a drink of water because his disciples had gone to Sychar for food. At that, the woman is taken aback, for Jesus is a man and a Jew, and she is a woman and a Samaritan. Then Jesus spoke to her of the living water that he could give to quench her spiritual thirst. A water that can transform a person's life, regardless of the past. Whoever lives *with* Christ and *in* Christ has in their heart a spring of water that will not run dry, a peace that passes understanding, a life abundant. The gift of God is Christ. And the gift of Christ is the Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, who dwells with us and will be in us. (14:16-17)

Then 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!”

In our lessons today we see that God is concerned with both our physical life *and* our spiritual life. God's gift of Jesus, who poured out his life blood to create and sustain new life in us, is just as important as the water we drank this morning.

As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.

So declares the 42<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. There's a lovely hymn based on this psalm entitled, “As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams.” Listen to the first two stanzas:

As pants the hart for cooling streams,  
When heated in the chase,  
So longs my soul, O God for thee  
And thy refreshing grace.

For thee, my God, the living God,  
My thirsty soul doth pine;  
O when shall I behold thy face,  
Thou Majesty divine!

There's also that lovely hymn that reflects our Gospel Lesson: "Fill My Cup, Lord."  
We'll sing it in just a moment.

My friends, let us drink deeply of the wellspring of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Thereby we shall learn to trust him and believe that he is with us in all the wildernesses of life, assured that the Lord cares for our earthly needs, and also for our spiritual needs.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.