

<Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95:1-11; John 4:5-15>

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

"Mom, are we there yet?!"

Apologies if that question triggers any of you, bringing back memories of too-long car trips with young children. Given one of our readings this morning - that of the people of God journeying with Moses through the wilderness - such a question, however, seems appropriate.

After all, Moses and the people are past the Red Sea and away from Pharaoh's armies, seemingly into safety after generations of slavery in Egypt. They are eager to become, truly, their own people and to reclaim who they are before God. As they move into the wilderness, the excitement undoes any capacity for patience, and while the exact question is not spoken in our Scripture reading this morning, the state of mind is certainly reflected: "are we there yet?"

Such a question might also be creeping into our own minds and spirits as we gather in worship today. The Third Sunday in Lent, we are approaching only the halfway point of this holy season of reflection. It might feel, however, that we should be much closer to the end of this journey, and we, along with our spiritual brothers and sisters of another time and place, might be wondering, "are we there yet?"

But even if this question is not spoken explicitly in our Exodus reading, another backseat comment, often accompanying such a query, is voiced to Moses by the people in the wilderness: "Dad, I'm thirsty."

We should note that, in our reading, this passage comes immediately after the story of the people complaining to Moses that they were hungry. History has a way of repeating itself. But we'll come back to Moses and the wandering, thirsty people in just a moment.

It is important for us to remember what life in a desert climate can be like. For those of us who have grown up or spent much of our lives here in Western New York, where streams and lakes abound, filled each year by regular rains and snow fall...where we have ready access to the largest fresh-water lakes in the world...it can be hard for us who have grown up here to imagine life in the desert, and just how barren it can be. But truly, ready access to fresh, drinkable water is not a given in these regions.

Which is one of the reasons why, in today's day and age, we are able to so accurately determine the location of Jacob's Well. Other biblical sites are not always so readily apparent. There are two viable locations of Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem, with valid arguments in favor of each. There are numerous points along the shores of The Sea of Galilee where Jesus might have met and called the disciples. And we're not even sure where the village of Emmaus, noted in Luke's gospel, is to be found. But we can

determine the location of Jacob's Well, in Nablus near the ruins of Shechem in the modern-day West Bank, because *it is the only viable well in that region*.

In the midst of a wide expanse of rocky, inhospitable desert, with no streams or lakes or other defining or contradictory features, there is one deep well, which still, to this day, draws water. And as Jesus and the disciples traveled through this barren landscape between Galilee and Jerusalem, this is the only place they could have stopped for water. Which is where Jesus meets the unnamed Samaritan woman, coming to the well.

This, too, is notable, and given both the landscape and the culture of the day, this occasion tells us much about this woman. Most women of the village would have done two things each day when going to the well to draw the needed water for the day: they would have gone together as a group, and they would have gone early in the morning before the sun was high in the sky.

This unnamed woman, now meeting with Jesus, has come by herself, and she has come at noon. And this alone tells us much about her, notably, that she is on the outsides - outside of acceptance, outside of community, outside of welcome. If we follow John's narrative further in this story, we hear some of why this is, but for now it is enough to know that she is, socially and emotionally, alone.

But Jesus has an offer for her: to be nourished with living water which has no end, and from which, one shall never be thirsty again. Never have to come to well alone, again. Never have to labor for water in the most intense part of the day, again.

I don't know that we can fully imagine how attractive and meaningful this offer might be, we who have grown up and lived among lakes, and rivers, and water so prevalently infusing all of our days. But she knows, and Jesus knows, and this offer is nothing short of the fullness of life. Or, as Jesus will refer to it later in John's gospel, "life abundant."

As we journey through Lent, what nourishes you and gives you life? What, in the life of this congregation, waters your spirits and makes it possible for you to grow? Where do we go to find spiritual water, living water which nurtures us?

Certainly, there are options. Wellspring for Women resumes its meetings this week, which I know from my own brief experiences is a discussion rich in nurture and enrichment. Similarly, the monthly meeting of men at Theology on Tap provides a deep well of discussion and refreshment. And there are others, as well, within our congregation and within our region - mission engagement and service opportunities, regular and special worship, fellowship and community groups. In the desert of our lives, when daily schedules and demands leave us feeling parched and empty, these are all deep wells from which we can find ourselves renewed by the living water of the Spirit.

"Are we there yet? I'm thirsty...".

The people of God, wandering in the wilderness, are complaining. They complain to Moses, but really they are complaining to God. And to a degree, we can't fault them; they're still relearning what it means to trust God to lead them, to meet their needs, to provide for them and ensure their security. After generations in bondage in Egypt, this is a long process. But God is present and willing to provide at each turn, and to remind the people over and over that God is and will be present. And this is no exception; rather, it is the continuation of such a lesson. God instructs Moses in what to do, and Moses goes to a rock, strikes it, and water flows forth. Clean and clear and cool and refreshing. Not from Moses, but from God. Just as God had shown Jacob where to dig a well to provide water in the barren landscape. But Moses takes the privilege of naming the place: *Massah* and *Meribah*, literally meaning “testing” and “quarreling.”

Names have meaning, and in this instance, the meaning is to remind the people of God's presence. God's providence. God's caretaking. To remind them that God crosses even natural lines to extend care and well-being. Jesus continues to show this reality by crossing lines of race and culture to show welcome and extend life to this unnamed Samaritan woman. And God still crosses such lines to welcome us. To nurture us. To fill us with ever-flowing springs of life.

Here in worship, gathered each week in this community of faith, we are named and renamed. Even if we continue to go by our given, common, everyday names, we are named and claimed again as God's own. In our baptisms, we have been claimed in the Spirit of God. In our connection to the community of faith, we are opened to receive the living water of the Spirit. We may not be “there” yet, we may still be traveling through the wilderness and the occasionally barren landscape of life, but the invitation stands to come, to drink deeply and fully, and to be refreshed in the Spirit of God, in the promise and life of Christ. Come, let us drink our fill. Amen.

*(Sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Jason Cashing at Clarence Presbyterian Church)*