

**Bible Study**  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year A**  
**March 19, 2017**

**[RCL] Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42**

**Exodus 17:1-7**

The Israelites are weary and thirsty in the wilderness, and in their desperation, they demand divine providence in the form of water. Moses is, perhaps, a bit frustrated by their rancorousness, but God rushes forth to nourish the people with a stream from the rock at Horeb. What do we make of these cranky Israelites and their successful demand? Should they have kept their heads down and trusted their leaders, or were they right to cry out for God's quenching mercy?

Our faith has a long tradition of humans quarreling with God: Jacob wrestled with an angel of the Lord; the Syrophenician woman challenged Jesus to honor her plea for healing. Ours is a God of great mystery, but also one of relationality. "I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb," God promises, and so it was. Where else might streams of mercy flow forth, if we but have the audacity to demand it?

- Recall a time when God responded to your petitions. Was the result what you anticipated?
- As people of God, how do we balance patient, trusting faith with the urgency of human need?

**Psalm 95**

Psalm 95 is a play in two acts, first celebratory and then admonishing. God is honored as the creator of the caverns, the seas, and the hills; it is a power of inconceivable majesty. All are invited to "kneel before the Lord our Maker," offering up a grateful submission to divine authority.

But hold on! We are then reminded of those naughty "forebears...at Meribah, and...Massah"—those same Israelites who demanded water from the rock at Horeb. God seems offended that they were unwilling to trust in His ways, and their generation was "detested." So much for pleading your case to the Almighty. We can take away a simple moral lesson from this, if we choose: putting God to the test is not going to win any celestial bonus points. But don't forget: God still showed up at Horeb, the water flowed, and the Israelites continued their journey. We may fight with God, we may ask too much of God, but the covenant remains. We are still on the road home.

- Where do you see God in the created order and in nature?
- Was there a time when you were offended by a request from someone you loved? How did you maintain the relationship?

**Romans 5:1-11**

Paul's reflections on suffering, endurance, and hope are a timely reflection during the Lenten season, when many of us take a hard look at the brokenness of ourselves and our world. In this passage he makes a bold statement: we are able to boast of a hope in "sharing in the glory of God." When we consider our flaws and foibles, both large and small, such hope seems almost ludicrous. How could we ever approach God's glory in our human weakness and fallibility?

The key, of course, is in Christ. His love unites us to the glory of God, and just as Christ's suffering justified us on the cross, so too does our own suffering draw us ever deeper into Christ's reconciliation. This is not a call to gratuitous penitence or a suggestion that we can save ourselves by loudly proclaiming our sins. God already knew what we needed, and it has been done, through Christ. We acknowledge our sin as the precondition of acknowledging grace, wherein "we will be saved by his life."

- What is your relationship with the concept of sin?
- How has God called you to reconciliation in your own life?

### **John 4:5-42**

You never know who you might encounter while going about your daily business. When the woman at the well encountered a man asking for a drink, she could have ignored him, or even complied silently, but something compelled her to engage. In doing so, she took part in a conversation that would alter her life and the lives of those in her community. How many times do we unwittingly pass by the face of God in the street because we are preoccupied with our own trivial concerns? What might we learn if we would be so bold as to ask "where do you get that living water?"

Again, we are drawn back to the Israelites in the wilderness. They asked for water, too, and were sated, at least for the needs of the moment. In Christ, we are asking for something far more enduring—a new fount, that of life itself, which will never run dry. But ask we must.

- What thirst would you ask God to quench right now?
- Where might you find Christ in the ordinary routines of your life?

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