



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 3 (A)

March 15, 2020

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

Exodus 17:1-7

After their release from the Egyptian regime, the Israelites spent time wandering in the wilderness, a barren and unforgiving land that untouched by culture. It is here that the Israelites start to form an identity as a people, but they face a daunting challenge. The bodies and consciousness of the Israelites are still colonized by the Egyptians, and a way this manifests itself is in “murmuring.” In the murmuring stories in Exodus and Numbers, the Israelites express dissatisfaction with Moses, and by extension, God. They usually complain about hunger and thirst in the wilderness. In this story, they demand water from Moses and God, putting them to the test.

Two significant obstacles to the liberation of the Israelites are their desire for security and their inability to trust God. Here, we see an example of those failings in Israel, and the same problems will haunt them through the generations. Freedom from a regime is life-threatening as it requires a complete transformation in lifestyle. As slaves, they could depend on the system to feed them. In the wilderness, they have to fend for themselves and trust in God’s providence, which is very difficult for a people who had learned to see a system as God. In Exodus, God gives Israel statutes, ordinances, and commandments to help create a new consciousness and society, but Israel keeps failing to create the community God wants to see.

- Reflect on the Israelites’ question: “Is the LORD among us or not?” Is it a reasonable question to ask? When, if ever, have you wanted to test God’s presence in your life?
- In what ways is your consciousness colonized like the Israelites? What is necessary for liberation?
- What times in your life have been wilderness experiences for you?

Psalm 95

In verses 1-7 of the Venite, there is music and motion: singing, the waves of the sea, molding of the land, and bowing. When we worship God with all our hearts, the world around us comes vividly alive. In the rolling hills of God’s creation, there are fields of plenty and green for God’s sheep to graze in. Reading this is almost overwhelming, but the language is straightforward and sincere—nothing about this is too good to be true.

But then we hit a wall when we reach verse 8, and this wall is made of the hardened hearts of the Israelites from the Exodus reading. These hearts are hard as the stone of idols, and it is the worship of security we see here that leads to the idolatry of the Golden Calf later in the story of Exodus. Verse 10 refers to Numbers and how God had an entire generation wander for 40 years in the wilderness after Israel refused to go into the Promised Land. The same behaviors and traumas are passed on to the next generation, though. What Israel needs in order to decolonize is deeper than what wilderness experiences and divine law can give. They shall not enter into the rest of the Promised Land.

- Is entering the Promised Land a choice? Why or why not?
- What parts of your world are alive and blossoming? What parts are hard as stone? What is different about these realms of your life?

Romans 5:1-11

Paul writes here that what is needed to enter into the rest of God is the fullness of right relationship with Jesus Christ. As a result of justification, we can be at peace with our conscience because reconciliation has been provided by God. Christ died for both righteous and sinful people. This is the unconditional love at the heart of Christian hope.

This hope is heavy and made of the same stuff as despair. As a child, I remember visiting the Cape Lookout Lighthouse in North Carolina, which is surrounded by a wild, blue sea. The waves, though they are breathtakingly beautiful, are dangerous and have sunk many ships. Suffering can make our own lives a burden to us, but in Jesus Christ, believers find a well of life-giving water to drink from. This water gives us the hope and the strength to go on.

- What role has Christian hope played in your life? What about disappointment?

John 4:5-42

This story is a deeply relational one. It opens with telling us the heritage of the land—Jacob gave the land the well is on to Joseph, and Jesus is descended from them. Jesus is tired from his journey, but in this story, he doesn't drink the water from the well or accept the food the disciples urged him to eat. He draws his sustenance from his relationship with the Father, and in the story, we see Jesus in relationship with the land, the Samaritan woman, and his disciples as well. The Evangelist states that Jews and Samaritans do not share things in common, but Jesus crosses lines of difference to connect with the Samaritan woman.

It is important to note that the woman says twice that Jesus, “told me everything I have ever done.” During the course of the conversation, Jesus reveals that he has intimate knowledge about the woman—that she has had five husbands and that she currently does not have a husband. This leads the woman to think Jesus is a prophet, and by the end of the story, she knows Jesus is the Messiah. Knowledge is necessary for love, and everything is known in relationship with God through Christ. To be unconditionally loved by God is to be completely vulnerable. It makes us understand how interdependent we are on God, each other, and the land. The fruits of the harvest are the fruits of relationships.

- Can you love someone you don't know? Why or why not?
- How do your relationships sustain you?
- Reflect on the interconnection of the readings for today. How do they inform each other?

Paige is currently in her second year of her Master of Divinity program at Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School. She has also studied interreligious dialogue and social justice activism at Pacific School of Religion as well as English and Philosophy as an undergraduate at Gallaudet University. She approaches scripture with the firm belief that God is on the side of the oppressed, often looking through the lenses of postcolonialism, disabilities studies, and feminism. In her spare time, Paige enjoys creative writing, martial arts, and open water swimming.